ST GREGORY THE GREAT

ABBOT SNOW O.S.B.

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ST GREGORY THE GREAT

ST GREGORY THE GREAT

HIS WORK AND HIS SPIRIT

By the Right Rev. ABBOT SNOW, O.S.B.
Monk of Downside Abbey

SECOND EDITION

Revised by DOM ROGER HUDLESTON, O.S.B.
Of the Same Abbey

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PREFACE

When the late Abbot Snow published the first edition of this work, in the year 1892, there was no extant life of St Gregory the Great in the English language, notwithstanding his claim on the reverence and gratitude of Englishmen. His book, however, cannot be described as a biograhpy of the Saint in the ordinary sense of the term. It is neither critical nor antiquarian, neither ascetical nor controversial, it does not even observe chronological sequence. It is simply an attempt to collect together sufficient material from his own letters and from his biographers to enable the reader to form an estimate of the work and character of the great Pontiff. We possess upwards of eight hundred of his letters, which furnish a ready means of ascertaining the characteristics, the methods of thought, the feelings, and the bent of mind of the Saint. Three biographies are found in the Benedictine edition of the works of St Gregory: one by Paul Warnfride, called Paul the Deacon (A.D. 730-796); one by John the Deacon (A.D. 872); and the third by Denis de la Marthe, one of the Benedictine editors. The first is short and fragmentary; the two last are founded almost entirely on the letters.

Instead of condensing the facts gathered from the letters, this work endeavours, by quoting extracts, to make St Gregory tell his own story as far as possible in his own words. The sound of St Gregory's

voice throughout the narrative will have a charm for many, and it enables the reader to form his own idea of the Saint. To avoid confusion arising from the nature of the government of the universal Church, the various incidents are grouped into subjects independently of strict chronological order, the letters being quoted according to the order in the Benedictine edition of his works. The introductory chapter, intended to show the difficulties of St Gregory's work and the unhappy state of Italy in the sixth century, has been somewhat curtailed in this edition, so as to limit it to matters which have a bearing on the rest of the work. Apart from this, the present editor has found little to change in the book, which was written as a labour of love by one who wished to make the apostle of the English better known to his fellow-countrymen, in the hope that it might "induce someone to undertake a full and elaborate biography." Although Abbot Snow did not live to see it, his hope was fulfilled in the year 1905, when Dr. F. Homes Dudden published his great work in two volumes, entitled *Gregory the Great; his Place in History and in Thought.*

G. ROGER HUDLESTON

DOWNSIDE ABBEY,
January, 1924.

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ST GREGORY THE GREAT

CHAPTER I

ROME IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

THEODORIC THE GOTH ushered in the sixth century by a state entry into Rome in the year 500. Senate and people came forth with ceremony to greet their barbarian sovereign, and to listen to his pledges of just laws and fair rule. Seven years previously Theodoric had assumed the government of Italy and the title of King with the sullen acquiescence of the Eastern Emperor. He now laid aside his sword, and turned his vigorous mind to the duties of civil government and to the consolidation of his power. His victorious army of Goths, 200,000 in number, settled down on the fair plains of Italy, appropriating a third of the lands on tenure of military service and freedom from taxes. They kept their own laws, their language, and their titles, but the civilising influence of the subject Romans gradually mitigated their fierceness and softened their rough ways.

In governing the conquered race, Theodoric adopted the institutions of the Empire, with their strength and their weakness: he fixed the seat of government at Ravenna, and appointed local governors over defined regions. In Rome he

soothed the Senate and patricians with sounding titles and respectful words, and gained the people by the establishment of order with abundance of food and the distraction of games. He stored corn in the magazines, distributed bread and meat to the needy, and delighted all with the wild beasts and spectacles of the arena. He respected the memorials of ancient splendour, temples, palaces, and aqueducts, and, to maintain the buildings, he appointed a public architect with an annual stipend of two hundred pounds of gold and the customs of the Lucrine port.

For thirty-three years Theodoric gave to Italy security, peace and prosperity. His wars on the frontier were few and promptly ended. Agriculture revived, buildings and churches arose in the principal towns. An Arian in religion, he treated Catholics with toleration. The Italians, however, brooded in discontent: the Goths were still Goths, their native fierceness at times broke loose in sudden forays, the constant military exercises were a grievance, taxation pressed heavily, and the people cast wistful glances to the East, sighing for freedom from their Gothic masters. Theodoric died on August 30, 526, and divided his dominions between his grandsons, assigning Spain to Amalaric and Italy to Athalaric, a boy of ten years old, whom he placed under the guardianship of his mother, Amalasuntha.

Only twenty-eight years of age, comely in person, and cultivated in mind, Amalasuntha strove to be a worthy niece of Clovis and daughter of Theodoric. She continued her father's principles of government, repressed an outbreak of the Goths when death relaxed his grasp over them, and laboured to make her

boy fit for kingly rule. Athalaric, as he grew in years, became restive under female restraint and the discipline of learning, and confided his boyish griefs to the sympathetic ears of his father's warriors. One festival day his mother boxed his ears for some disobedience, and he passionately appealed to the chiefs. They angrily interfered, accused her of designs against his life and kingdom, declared it degrading for a son of Theodoric to be ruled by women or bored by books, and took him away from his mother's control. Amalasuntha yielded to force and, commencing a secret intrigue with the Eastern court, provoked dissension amongst the Gothic leaders and procured the assassination of three of the principal nobles. Athalaric ran through a brief course of debauchery, and died of intemperance in 532, at the early age of sixteen. On the death of her son, Amalasuntha married her cousin Theodatus, a weak, ignoble character, and announced to the Emperor their accession to the throne of Italy. Ill-mated and ill-matched, they soon quarrelled; Theodatus resented his wife's efforts to rule him, and imprisoned her in a small island in the lake of Bolsena. The Emperor Justinian took advantage of the captivity of the queen and the disunion of the Goths to temporise with both parties; his agents openly interceded for her life and secretly schemed for her death. Amalasuntha was strangled on April 30, 535, and her murder furnished Justinian with a pretext for the invasion of Italy.

This task he entrusted to Belisarius, who, fresh from the conquest of the Vandals in Africa, appeared off the coast of Sicily with 8,000 men—a force small

in number, but powerful from the fame and the skill of its general. The Sicilians at once submitted, and without a battle the island was again annexed to the Empire. Belisarius wintered in Sicily to rest his army after the African campaign. Meanwhile the craven Theodatus, trembling at the prospect of war with the Empire and at the very name of Belisarius, offered to surrender Sicily, which was already lost, and to pay tribute in money and men. The imperial agents played upon his fears, and persuaded him to surrender his whole kingdom for a pension of 48,000 crowns. Pending the conveyance of this offer to the Emperor, the Gothic troops in Dalmatia defeated and killed two Roman generals. At this Theodatus plucked up courage, despair yielded to presumption, and, on the return of the agents, he met them with scorn and defiance.

Belisarius forthwith commenced hostilities, set sail from Messina, landed his troops without opposition at Reggio in 536, and advancing with his army and fleet along the coast, invested Naples by sea and land. Strong in its position, with abundance of provisions and water, Naples might have defied the imperial power, had not a prying Isaurian discovered a dry aqueduct leading into the city. In the dead of night four hundred soldiers crept in single file along the passage, raised themselves by a rope into a garden, surprised the sentinels, and opened the gates for their expectant comrades. Belisarius spared the city, and used his authority to restrain his soldiers from pillage.

Meanwhile Theodatus, too timid to meet his adversary in the field and too listless to concentrate the

Gothic forces that were dispersed over Dalmatia, Venetia, and Gaul, remained inactive and safe within the walls of Rome. In their emergency the chiefs in the Italian camp deposed the feeble Theodatus, and in his stead elected their general, Vitiges, a man of note in the Illyrian wars. At the first symptom of revolt Theodatus fled, and was slain by the hand of a private enemy. Vitiges, anxious to fortify his title by a semblance of hereditary right, cast his eyes towards the daughter of Amalasuntha at Ravenna, and leaving 4,000 troops to defend Rome, he persuaded the Gothic chiefs to retire to Ravenna. Immediately on his departure the Pope and clergy, senate and people, invited Belisarius to Rome, offering their allegiance to the Emperor. The general, after securing his conquests in the south, entered Rome without bloodshed on December 10, 536, and again united the Eternal City to the Empire, after it had borne the barbarian yoke for sixty years.

The enthusiasm of the Romans at the triumphal entry of Belisarius turned into dismay when they found him at once making preparations for a siege. Vitiges recalled the scattered Gothic troops to Ravenna, and after gathering 150,000 warriors, marched upon Rome, arriving at the Milvian Bridge, two miles from the city, in March, 537. Belisarius had prepared to dispute the passage of the Tiber, but the defenders of the bridge fled in terror at the sight of the advancing host, and retreated within the walls of Rome.

The Gothic king, respecting the valour of the Romans and the heroism of Belisarius, allowed the siege to subside into a blockade. For twelve months

and nine days the barbarians sat down before the city, unable to surround it or effectually to cut off supplies. By skilful sallies Belisarius harassed their camps; by frequent negotiations he distracted their attention while he implored the Emperor to send reinforcements. He had filled the granaries and secured a supply of water, but the length of the siege exhausted the provisions. He sent away the women, children and slaves, and the soldiers who remained suffered much from unwholesome food and disease. Meanwhile the Emperor tardily responded to the urgent appeals for help. After delay and hesitation some 4,000 men were despatched, who eluded the vigilance of the Goths, and entered the city with supplies of wine and flour. Famine, disease, and weariness affected the Goths, and Vitiges, after losing a third of his army, recrossed the Milvian Bridge, and retired to the north with his troops in March, 538. Belisarius followed in pursuit, opened communications with Narses, and, aided by a reinforcement of 7,000 men, compelled the Goths to take refuge within the impregnable walls of Ravenna.

With the Gothic monarch cooped up at Ravenna, his forces scattered here and there over the kingdom, and the provinces willing to submit, Italy seemed within the grasp of the imperial generals, when jealousy and dissension paralysed all effort. Accusations against Belisarius were despatched to Constantinople, the soldiers sided with one general or the other, and Narses with his party left the camp and commenced independent operations. During the hostilities the Emperor applied to the Franks for aid, urging the ties of religion for the extermination

of the Arians, while Vitiges, on the other hand, offered lands and money. The gold of the Goths prevailed, and in the summer of 538 a force of 10,000 Burgundians descended from the Alps. They joined some troops of Vitiges, took Milan, spread ruin and desolation around, and are said to have slaughtered 300,000 men, women and children. In the spring of 539 Theodebert, the grandson of Clovis, led a host of 100,000 barbarians into North Italy. Mindful of the cruelties of the previous year, the people in terror concealed themselves in the mountains and valleys. Neither Roman nor Goth knew the destination of the army, both offered friendship, but Theodebert did not declare his intentions until he had crossed the Po at Pavia, when he assaulted at the same time the camps of both Roman and Goth. Instead of uniting against the common foe, both armies allowed themselves to be defeated separately and fled, abandoning Italy to the mercies of the rapacious host. Without thought of conquest or settlement, the Franks destroyed all that crossed their path, spreading misery and desolation until the scene of riot and devastation reacted upon themselves. Food and wine failed them; they ate diseased cattle and drank fetid water, the climate helped the sickly diet, dysentery swept away a third of the mighty army, and the remainder clamoured for their homes. They went as quickly as they came, leaving behind a huge track of ruin, spoil, and desolation.

Freed from the presence of the Franks, Belisarius set to work to complete the conquest of Italy. The Gothic forces still outnumbered the imperial army, but were scattered, and no inducement could tempt

Vitiges from the stronghold of Ravenna. Belisarius, after defeating the Goths at Osimo, invested Ravenna in order to reduce it by blockade, for its position made it impregnable by assault. To his astonishment, ambassadors arrived from Justinian with a treaty of peace, which provided for the division of Italy between the Empire and the Goths. Vitiges, delighted at the prospect of escape, eagerly accepted the offer; but Belisarius, knowing the sacrifice that the treaty involved, ventured to refuse to sign it, and the Goths would respect no other signature. Dispirited at the failure of the negotiations, the Goths contrasted the avarice and selfishness of Vitiges with the generosity and heroism of Belisarius, and, in their admiration for him, offered him the Gothic crown, if he would himself become their king. The loyalty of Belisarius withstood the glitter of the crown; but, in order to gain possession of the city, he affected to consent. To the surprise of the Romans, the gates were opened, and, without a blow, Belisarius triumphantly marched into the impregnable Gothic capital in December, 539. Other towns and villages submitted, and Italy seemed again to be a part of the Empire when jealousy repeated the accusations against Belisarius, who was compelled to hurry to Constantinople, where he took his captive, Vitiges, to the foot of the throne of the Emperor.

At the unexpected recall of Belisarius the Goths took heart. They had been defeated and scattered, but not exterminated; and they attributed their losses to the skill and valour of Belisarius. For Vitiges they substituted Totila, who accepted the crown in the year 540. He mustered the 5,000 remaining

troops at Pavia, made them a stirring address, and undertook to restore their kingdom. Jealous of the success and influence of Belisarius, the Emperor divided the command amongst eleven generals, but dissensions and self-interest produced inaction, and they neglected to crush the disunited Goths. The appearance of Totila aroused the generals from their torpor; they collected an army of 20,000 men, and met the young king at Faenza. At the first onset the imperial troops threw down their arms and fled disgracefully. Totila pursued his advantage. Disregarding the towns on the route, he marched rapidly through Italy, blockaded Naples, and soon captured the city. His moderation gained the goodwill of the people. Lucania, Apulia, and Calabria submitted, and, after reducing the towns of Southern and middle Italy, he appeared before Rome in May, 546.

Totila made no attempt to storm the city, but relied on the potent aid of famine. Pope Vigilius had filled the granaries with corn from Sicily, which Bessas, the governor, doled out in sparse supplies to the soldiers and sold at exorbitant prices to the citizens. During the progress of the siege hunger and distress reduced the people to the last extremity, patricians and nobles wandered through the streets begging their bread, and the poor were glad to gather grass and nettles from the crevices of the walls. The unhappy people shrank into living spectres; Bessas would neither feed them nor let them go; for he sold permissions to leave the city, and allayed discontent by visions of fleets and armies coming to the rescue. Belisarius made a valiant effort to relieve the city. With the limited troops at his disposal he crossed the

Adriatic, and by skill and bravery forced Totila's defences on the Tiber; but Bessas refused to assist him by a sally, and the great general, deeply mortified, was compelled to withdraw his troops.

The sore straits of the city provoked the usual treachery. Four of the garrison sought the Gothic camp with an offer to open the gates, which, after some hesitation, Totila accepted. At the appearance of the Goths in the city Bessas at once withdrew with his troops, and after a seven months' siege Totila gained possession of the capital in December, 547. At the intercession of the Archdeacon Pelagius, he spared the lives of the people, but pillaged all the gold and silver, and determined to destroy the city. He demolished one-third of the walls and prepared to level all the memorials of antiquity, but finally consented to spare the city.

Wasting no time in Rome Totila marched into Southern Italy, took Reggio and Tarentum, overran Sicily, reduced Corsica and Sardinia, and extended his conquests to Epirus. The Gothic kingdom was again established.

In the weakness and disgrace of the imperial cause Pope Vigilius and the patrician Cethegus set sail for Constantinople, and threw themselves at the feet of the Emperor. Their plaintive story roused Justinian from lethargy, and made him conscious that the complete loss of Italy would result from his neglect. He determined upon immediate action, levied fleets and armies, and entrusted the command to his nephew Germanus. The armament departed, but Germanus died before it reached Italy, and was succeeded in 552 by Narses, who collected large forces, secured the

assistance of 5,000 Lombards, and landed at Ravenna. Fear of disunion and the expense of delay suggested prompt and decisive measures, so that, remaining only nine days at Ravenna to consolidate his forces, he issued forth to challenge the Gothic army.

Totila at once recognised his danger. With a large and well-equipped force threatening his kingdom, with a knowledge that clergy and people would welcome the imperial troops, and more than a suspicion of treason amongst his own followers, he determined to stake all on a single battle. The Gothic army marched from Rome and met the imperial forces near Tagini in July, 552. To Narses' offer of pardon, Totila replied that he would conquer or die. The battle commenced; the Gothic cavalry charged the centre of the enemy, leaving their infantry far behind in their impetuous onslaught; the wings closed upon them, and a murderous shower of arrows wrought such slaughter that they turned and trampled their own infantry in their flight. The imperial troops pursued their advantage, and the Goths, unable to re-form in the confusion, could not withstand the advance; they lost 6,000 men, and Totila, mortally wounded, was borne to a spot seven miles from the battlefield, where he expired unmolested.

Narses at once dismissed the Lombards, who, by their rapacity and cruelty, had brought discredit upon his arms, and detached a force to watch them across the frontier. With the remainder of his army he marched through Tuscany, appeared before Rome, and speedily captured the city. By way of reprisal, the Goths massacred 300 hostages of the noblest families whom they had retained beyond the Po, and

intercepted and slew the senators, who were prematurely hastening to the capital. With this the Roman senate practically disappears, for although the rank and title were afterwards assumed by individuals, we hear no more of its assembling or taking part in the government.

But the struggle was not yet over, for in response to the call of the Goths, 75,000 Franks and Alemanni poured into the plain of Milan in August, 553. They were led by two brothers, Lothaire and Buccelin, who marched southwards pillaging the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, and arranging to unite their forces at the southern extremity of the peninsula. Climate and indulgence, however, produced the usual result on the barbarians, disease swept away the whole of Lothaire's army, and Buccelin, at Capua, with 30,000 men, awaited in vain the arrival of his brother. During the winter Narses concentrated 18,000 troops in the neighbourhood of Rome, and in the spring of 554 marched them to the Volturnus to attack Buccelin. The barbarians, armed with sword and buckler, hatchet and javelin, and clad in tunics of linen and fur, were formidable only at close quarters. They advanced in a solid wedge. Narses allowed them to pierce his centre, and wheeled round the archers in the wings to pour a deadly shower of arrows into the mass. In the confusion of the slaughter the victorious army charged with sword and spear, and completed the destruction of the barbarians. After this decisive victory Narses reduced the remaining towns and brought the Gothic kingdom of Italy to a close in 554.

Italy now became again a province of the Empire,

ruled by an exarch at Ravenna. The Goths amalgamated with the inhabitants or left the country, and the Franks did not renew their inroads. Narses was appointed the first exarch. With his eye on the whole kingdom he maintained discipline in the army and restored the fortifications. A pragmatic sanction regulated the civil state, the laws of Justinian formed the basis of the administration of justice, and a fair and moderate spirit adjusted the difficulties as to property, taxes, etc., arising from the wars. Dukes were appointed as governors over the chief cities, and Rome became a city of the second rank, the seat of government remaining at Ravenna. The goodwill and energy displayed by the imperial officials, however, could not cope with the havoc, misery, and depopulation arising from a perpetual state of war.

For some two hundred years Italy was divided between the Lombards and the Empire: the king had his headquarters at Pavia, the exarch at Ravenna. The Empire held sway over Romagna, Ferrara, and five cities on the Adriatic; three subordinate provinces of Rome, Venice, and Naples with adjacent territory; the islands of Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia. The rule of the exarch extended over a smaller area, but embraced a fair share of the wealth, industry, and population. The Lombard kingdom comprised the remainder of Italy: the Tyrol, Piedmont, Milan, part of Venetia, Modena, Parma, Tuscany, the coast of Genoa from Perugia to the Adriatic, Beneventum, and most of the kingdom of Naples.

This brief story of war, famine, and misery in Italy during the sixth century indicates the unhappy condition of the land. It leaves to the imagination the

state of the country, the disruption of society, the distress of the people. For sixty years, with but one short interval, the horrors of war had rested on the land, with indiscriminate slaughter, unrestrained plunder, and depopulation. Famine, pestilence, and poverty accompanied the ravages of war. Lands remained untilled, commerce became impossible, industries died out. The overthrow of civil government, military exactions, and the avarice of governors, civil and military, made property insecure, justice uncertain, and law inoperative. The moral evils kept pace with the external ruin; grinding oppression, insecurity of life, and contempt of law, left their mark on the character of the people. The power and influence of the Church were paralysed. She could not provide for the government of dioceses, for the succession of clergy, or for ecclesiastical discipline; for her priests were slaughtered, her churches destroyed, and her revenues appropriated. She could not promote education nor carry out her ritual, when even the instruction of the people and the administration of the sacraments became arduous and uncertain. To this darkness and chaos reconstruction came through the luminous, orderly, and vigorous mind of Pope Gregory the Great.

CHAPTER II

EARLY YEARS

On the Clivus Scaurus, a declivity of the Coelian Hill, some 120 yards from the Colosseum, stood the palace of Gordianus, a man of senatorial rank and considerable wealth. Across the valley, on the Palatine Hill, the huge palace of the emperors reared its tiers of marble pillars and arcades, and immediately in front the palace of Septimius Severus and the lofty Septizonium almost cast their shadow on the house of Gordianus. Hun, Vandal, and Goth had borne away the portable treasures of the city—its gold, silver, and bronze—but had spared its buildings, whose beauty of outline and wealth of marble still made Rome a city of palaces, and reminded the diminished population of its past glories. In spite of severance from the Empire, occupation by barbarians, frequent sieges and pillage, Gordianus retained the palace of his ancestors as well as large estates in Sicily, and the appointments of his house doubtless corresponded with his rank and wealth. The marble colonnades of the atrium and cavaedum, the central fountain surrounded by choice plants, the frescoed walls of the triclinia, the rich tapestries and the sumptuous furniture, testified to a home of comfort and luxury. Here probably Gregory was born about the year 540, three years before the death of St

Benedict. His family, the Anicii, had also given saintly heroes to the Church, for his grandfather, Felix, had sat in the chair of Peter, his mother, Sylvia, and his aunts, Tharsilla and Emiliana, are numbered among the saints, and the great St Benedict was descended from a branch of the Anicii. Gregory, in the Homilies on the Gospels, thus mentions his family:

"My father had three sisters who were consecrated virgins, by name Tharsilla, Gordiana, and Emiliana. Animated with the same fervour, dedicated at the same time, living under the same regular discipline, they led a domestic life in their own house. When Tharsilla and Emiliana had continued for some time in this mode of life, they made daily progress in the love of their Maker, and although they remained here in the body, in their soul they daily dwelt in eternal things. But the spirit of Gordiana by daily lapses began to cool from the ardour of intimate love, and to return somewhat to the love of the world. Frequently would Tharsilla, with much sorrow, say to her sister Emiliana, 'I see that our sister Gordiana is not as we are, for I think she leans to exterior things, and in her heart does not keep to what she promised.' They repeatedly strove to correct her by gentle remonstrance, and to restrain her lightness of manner that it might be more in accordance with the staidness of her religious habit. During these words of correction, she for the moment resumed a serious countenance, but as soon as the time of admonition had passed, her assumed gravity of manner passed away also, and she again returned to trivial talk, she preferred the society of worldly girls, and whatever

time was not given to the world became very burdensome to her.

"In the midst of her sisters my Aunt Tharsilla, by means of constant prayer, assiduous mortification, and singular abstinence, had attained a reputation for great holiness by her saintly life, and one night, as she herself narrated, there appeared to her in a vision my ancestor Felix, Bishop of this Roman Church, who showed her a mansion of eternal brightness, saying, 'Come, for I shall receive thee into this mansion of light.' Soon after this, being prostrated with fever, her last hour drew near. Since Christians are accustomed to surround the bedside of the dying to offer their consolation, so, at the hour of her departure, several men and women stood around her bed, amongst whom my mother was present. Tharsilla, suddenly looking up, saw Jesus coming, and, with great earnestness, began to cry out to the bystanders, saying 'Stand back, stand back, for Jesus comes,' and as she bent forward towards him, whom she saw approach, her holy soul was freed from the flesh, and so wondrous a fragrance was spread around that the sweetness itself indicated to all that the Author of Sweetness had been there. When, as is the custom with the dead, her body was washed, the skin on her elbows and knees was found, from long use in prayer, to have become hardened like that of a camel, her dead flesh thus testifying to what her living spirit constantly practised.

"This happened shortly before Christmas Day. Soon afterwards she appeared at night in a vision to her sister Emiliana, saying, 'Come, for though I have passed the festival of the birth of our Lord without

you, I shall pass the holy festival of the Epiphany with you.' But, anxious about the safety of her sister Gordiana, the other at once replied, 'If I come alone, to whom shall I entrust our sister Gordiana?' To this she answered with a sorrowful countenance, 'Come, for our sister Gordiana is reckoned amongst lay people.' An illness immediately followed this vision, and, the sickness increasing, she died, as had been foretold, before the festival of the Epiphany. Gordiana, as soon as she saw herself left alone, increased her waywardness, and what before was hidden in the desire of her mind, she now put into execution by evil deeds. For, unmindful of the fear of the Lord, unmindful of modesty and reverence, unmindful of her consecration, she married the tenant of her estate." [1]

No record exists of Gregory's infancy, boyhood, or youth; like other great men, the unfolding and shaping of the character are hidden; the flower and the fruit catch the eye, the growth of the plant is unnoticed. The events sketched in the last chapter suggest a troubled childhood. Two years before his birth the twelve-months' siege of Vitiges left Rome crippled and starving; during his infancy Totila was subduing Southern Italy; in 546, when he was six years old, Rome passed through the terrible siege ending in its capture by Totila and its complete desertion; in 547 Belisarius occupied it and repulsed the assault of the Gothic king; in 549 Totila again took the city; in 553 Narses regained possession of the capital, which was followed by the massacre of the patricians; and in 553-4 the whole of Italy was ravaged by the merciless invasion of the Franks and

[1] *Hom. in Ev.*, xxxviii.

Alemanni. Thus until Gregory was fourteen years of age unceasing calamity and disaster would make his education and training both difficult and dangerous, though possibly during the troubles he was safe on the family estates in Sicily. The tone pervading all his writings, and his personal character, point to careful, early training in piety and holiness, and this may safely be attributed to the tender and loving solicitude of his saintly mother, Sylvia. She blended the noble qualities of the Roman matron with the higher discipline of Christian virtue, and the lawlessness and iniquity of the times would induce her to devote special care to the training of her children. When freed from domestic cares by the death of her husband, she retired to a cell near St. Paul's, called Cella Nuova, and there spent the days of her widowhood in prayer and asceticism.

When the triumph of Narses brought peace to the kingdom by the establishment of the Exarchate of Ravenna, Gregory had attained the age of fifteen. The schools and lectures recommenced, and the ordinary course of a liberal education was again open to the Roman youth. Gregory devoted himself to grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, civil and canon law. He developed quick intelligence, amiability, force of character, and natural eloquence. St Gregory of Tours states "that he was so skilled in grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric, that in the city itself he was deemed inferior to none."[1] Paul the Deacon thus speaks of his early studies: "While yet young in age he possessed a matured mind, clinging to the teachings of the ancients, and if he chanced to hear

[1] *Hist. Franc.*, x 1.

what was worth hearing, he did not sluggishly let it pass into oblivion, but retained it with tenacious memory. In those days he drew into a thirsty breast streams of learning, which afterwards at the fitting time he poured forth in honeyed words."[1] At an early age he is said to have shown an inclination for the clerical state, but his father dissuaded him therefrom, desiring him to continue his legal studies.

His talents, success, and lineage fitted him for a public career, and in 574 the Emperor, Justin the Younger, appointed him Praetor of Rome, at the age of thirty-four. This office brought responsibility as well as dignity, for besides the leading position amongst the citizens, he wielded the chief judicial authority in the city. In public functions he wore the trabea, a silken robe adorned with jewels, the special insignia of consuls and praetors. His impartial justice, winning ways, and open-handed charity gained the hearts of the Romans, who idolised him: in the tribunal, in the streets, he was greeted with respectful acclamations. It was a time of anxiety and embarrassment for officials in Rome, for Alboin and the Lombards had established themselves in Italy six years previously, and although they did not besiege Rome, they frequently ravaged the neighbourhood, keeping the city in a state of constant alarm. Amid the cares and duties, the parade and dignity of his office, the soul of Gregory took refuge in an inner, spiritual life: he spent long hours at prayer in church or in private; he courted the friendship of ecclesiastics, and would slip away from the most brilliant circle for

[1] *Vita S Greg.*, ii.

the society of simple, holy monks. He became intimate with three Benedictines, Constantine and Simplician, of Monte Cassino, and Valentine, Abbot of Latran. Since the death of St Benedict, the Benedictine rule had spread through Italy, and was already adopted in several of the monasteries then existing in Rome. The interior peace of his three friends, and the self-sacrifice and seclusion of the monastic life, captivated the mind of Gregory. He did not at first seek to join them, preferring to lead a holy life in the midst of the world, but he determined to give up all that he possessed to God and St Benedict. Succeeding to the family estates on the death of his father, he carried out his intention by founding six monasteries in Sicily, and not content with that sacrifice he converted his paternal house on the Coelian Hill into a monastery, dedicating it to the Apostle St Andrew. When he had thus stripped himself of his possessions, he could no longer resist the craving to give himself also to God. He sold the remainder of his patrimony, distributed the money to the poor, and resigning his office in the year 575, he took the Benedictine habit in his old home. This act discloses his force of character; position, wealth, dignity, power, popular favour, a brilliant career—all were abandoned for the coarse garb and hidden life of a monk, in order that he might live in close communion with God. The future he could not foresee, or the designs of God; he simply buried himself from the gaze of men: *unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.*[1]

[1] John xii 24.

The monastery of St Andrew[1] was not a mere retreat of ease and comfort. The monks, on taking possession, had removed all signs of luxury, and adapted the palace to the requirements of their rule. The Benedictine rule in its rigour tried a constitution nurtured in the surroundings of a patrician home; the divine office, manual labour, study, silence, spare diet, broken sleep, rough garments, minute obedience, absolute poverty, passed the whole frame through the crucible, and purified the soul from the dross of attachment to bodily comfort. It was a strange

[1] The present church of San Gregorio, on the Coelian, occupies the site of the monastery of St Andrew and the paternal home of St Gregory, large remains of which still await excavation beneath the present buildings. The Benedictines for a long time retained possession of the monastery. At the time of John the Deacon (A.D. 872) it was inhabited by Greek monks, possibly introduced by Pope Stephen III. For some time it seems to have been nearly deserted, and in 1573 Gregory XIII restored it to the Benedictine family, and consigned it to the Camaldolese Congregation, who now have a small community there. On the seizure of Rome by Victor Emmanuel the Italian Government took possession of the property, assigned the larger part of the monastery as an asylum for old women, and allowed the Camaldolese to remain in the smaller portion as caretakers of the church. The spot has a special interest to Englishmen—as the monastic home of St Augustine and his companions, who converted our Saxon forefathers; it may be considered the cradle of England's early faith. The external walls of the church and the internal piers are those of St Gregory's time, for at the restorations in 1725 these were carefully preserved, thus retaining the outline of the church as planned by St Gregory. The chapels contain a fine marble statue of the saint begun by Michael Angelo and finished by Cordieri, the marble table at which he is said to have daily entertained twelve poor persons, an ancient picture of our Lady, and some interesting frescoes of the mission and landing of St Augustine in England.

change from the life of a praetor to the life of a monk. Gregory sought no exemption or privilege; he took the last place in the community, ministered to the brethren, and became a servant in his own house. The hours unoccupied by common observance he devoted to the study of sacred Scripture, where he found a sweetness not tasted in Pagan philosophy. He spent much time in prayer. He showed special devotion to the Mother of God, and frequently invoked her intercession. An ancient picture of our Lady before which he was accustomed to pray is still preserved in the church on the Coelian. He practised rigid mortification, he retrenched from the scant food allowed by the rule, and a little pulse sent by his mother from her cell comprised his daily diet. This proving too meagre for sustenance, he became subject to fainting fits, so that his brethren compelled him to take more nourishment. Indeed, he seems to have permanently injured his constitution, for throughout life he suffered continually from ill-health. In the monastery his stomach grew so weak that he could not keep even the ordinary fasts. This became a great trial to him, and one Easter-eve he asked the prayers of Eleutherius, an old monk of reputed sanctity. In his *Dialogues* Gregory thus relates the incident.

"I myself experienced the great power of the prayer of this holy man. For at one time in the monastery I suffered from internal spasms, and every moment I seemed near to death with repeated pains—which disease physicians call by the Greek term syncope—and if the brethren had not frequently supplied me with food, the source of life seemed likely to be exhausted. When Easter-day was at hand, and I could

not fast on Holy Saturday, on which day all, even little children, fast, I began to be upset as much by grief as by sickness. But my dejected soul quickly came to a determination to take the same servant of God secretly to the oratory, and to ask him by his prayers to obtain from Almighty God that he would give me strength to fast on that day. This I did, and as soon as we entered the oratory, at my humble request he gave himself up to prayer with tears, going out, after a while, when he had finished his prayer. But at the sound of his blessing, my stomach gained such strength that food and sickness were entirely taken out of memory. I began to wonder who I might be and who I had been, for when my illness returned to my mind I recognised nothing of what I remembered to have suffered. And when my mind was occupied over the business of the monastery, I completely forgot my sickness."[1]

Far from regretting the comfort and dignity that he had given up, or growing weary of the restraint, the hardship and the monotony of a monk's life, the time glided by in content and cheerfulness. In after days he cast back fond looks at his monastic home, often speaking of the time spent there as the happiest of his life, and constantly lamenting his severance from his cell. "My poor mind," he writes in his *Dialogues*, "distracted by the worry of business, reverts to old monastic days when passing events glided along far beneath it, while, soaring above the whirl of activity, it dwelt on things of God alone, and though still in the body, escaped from the bonds of flesh in contemplation, looking upon death, which almost all

[1] *Dialogues*, iii 33.

consider a penalty, as the entry into life and the crown of its labours. Now, through the cares of the pastoral charge, it is mixed up with the affairs of laymen, and, after so sweet a glimpse of peace, is again soiled with the mire of worldly business. While for the benefit of others it wanders here and there over exterior things, even when it seeks the interior it undoubtedly returns less fitted for it. Thus I weigh what I endure, and I weigh what I have lost; and when I see what I have lost, what I endure becomes more burdensome. For now I am tossed on the waves of a mighty ocean, and as a vessel my mind is dashed to and fro by the gusts of a violent storm; and when I recall my former life, looking back into the past, I sigh for the distant shore. And what is still worse, while I am borne on these huge beating billows, I can scarcely get a glimpse of the harbour I have quitted." [1]

The cloistral life, upon which Gregory's memory fondly dwelt, comprised days of discipline and observance as well as peace and contemplation. He exacted the observance of rule as rigidly as he himself practised it. He himself records an instance of this in the *Dialogues:* "Nor should I pass over what I remember to have occurred in my own monastery previously to the last three years. A certain monk named Justus, skilled in the art of medicine, was accustomed diligently to minister to me in the monastery, and to attend to me in my constant ailments. Struck down by illness, he had come near to his end. He was attended in his sickness by his brother Copiosus, who at the present time earns his living by the practice of medicine in the city. The aforesaid

[1] Preface to the *Dialogues.*

Justus, when he realised that death was approaching, made known to his brother Copiosus that he had secreted three gold pieces. He certainly could not rightly conceal this fact from the brethren, but searching carefully and examining all the drugs, the three gold pieces were found hidden in a medicine. When this was at once reported to me, I could not look with unconcern on so great a sin in a brother who had lived in the midst of us, for it was always a rule of our monastery that all the brethren should live together in common, and no one was allowed to possess anything of his own. Cast down with much dejection, I began to think how I might make it serve for the cleansing of our dying brother, and for a warning to the living brethren. I therefore summoned Pretiosus, the prior of the monastery, and said to him, 'Go, and see that none of the brethren have any communication with the dying man; let him receive no word of comfort from the lips of anyone, but when at the approach of death he shall ask for the brethren, let his brother Copiosus tell him that he is loathed by all the brethren for having secreted the money, so that at least in death the bitterness of his fault may sink into his mind, and he may expiate the sin that he has committed. When he shall have died, let not his body be buried with those of his brethren, but make a grave in some dung heap, throw his body into it, and cast upon it the three gold pieces that he left, all crying out together, "Thy money go with thee to perdition," and then cover him over with earth.' In each of these things I wished to benefit both the dying brother and the living, so that the bitterness of death might free him from his fault, and so marked a condemnation of avarice might pre-

vent others from repeating his offence: which so happened.

"For when the monk came to the point of death he anxiously sought to commend himself to his brethren, but none of the brethren were allowed to visit him or to speak to him, and his brother pointed out to him that he was loathed by them all. He at once vehemently lamented his crime, and in the midst of his grief passed out of life, and was buried as I had directed. All the brothers, frightened by the sentence, began immediately to deliver up the smallest and commonest things, which it was quite lawful for them to have, and to fear greatly lest they might have anything for which they could be blamed. When thirty days had elapsed after his death, my mind began to feel compassion for the deceased brother, and with much grief to ponder over his punishment, and to seek for some expiation for his robbery. Again I called Pretiosus, the prior of the monastery, and sorrowfully said to him, 'Our brother is a long time dead, and is suffering in fire: we ought to show some charity to him, and so far as we can to help him, that he may be released. Go, therefore, and see that the holy Sacrifice is offered for him for thirty days from to-day, and let not a single day pass by without the saving Host being immolated for his absolution.' He went away and did what I told him. Engaged over other things, we did not count the days as they passed, but one night the deceased monk appeared to his brother Copiosus in a vision. On seeing him he questioned him, saying, 'What is it, brother? How fare you?' He replied, 'Up to this I have fared badly, but now, indeed, I am happy, for this day I am received into

the communion of saints.' Copiosus immediately went and told it to the brethren of the monastery. The brethren counted the days and that was the thirtieth day on which the sacrifice had been offered for him."[1] This incident discloses the charity that tempered Gregory's love for discipline, and led to the devotion of offering thirty Masses for the deceased, still called the "Gregorian Masses."

The tenderness of his heart for the poor found an outlet even in the cloister. In the hospital erected at the entrance to the monastery the Romans might see their former praetor, in coarse garb, kneeling at the feet of beggar and slave, rendering lowly offices to those whom he had judged in his state robes on the judicial tribunal. While reading in his cell, a shipwrecked merchant came to him one day with a pitiable tale of distress, which exacted six scudi from Gregory: the next day he again appeared urging the greatness of his loss and liabilities, and the little help he could obtain in the city, and he again received six scudi: a third time he returned and dwelt upon the disgrace of meeting his creditors without satisfying them. Then Gregory, with much sympathy, finding that there was no more money in the monastery, gave him the silver dish on which his mother sent him his daily pittance of pulse.

Gregory's cloistral life did not lessen his talents or capacity for administration. Although monks engage to live together within the monastery in common observance, they may undertake external work at the call of obedience. In the East they left the desert to preach in the towns and minister to the people, and

[1] *Dialogues*, iv 55.

their success in combating heresy led to their being frequently summoned to the assistance of the bishops. In the West St Benedict spent much time in instructing the rude peasants around Subiaco, and did not rest until he had banished the last relics of paganism from the neighbourhood of Monte Cassino; the missionary labours of St Columbanus and St Gall brought many souls to the faith. Pope Benedict I utilised the abilities of Gregory by creating him one of the seven regionary deacons of Rome. Ecclesiastically, the city was divided into seven districts or regions, each presided over by a deacon, who superintended the ecclesiastical affairs of the district. Obedient to the voice of the Pope, with reluctance he occupied himself again in external affairs, still residing in the monastery. The people welcomed his reappearance amongst them with acclamation; his saintliness and his monk's habit gained him greater respect than the insignia of the praetorship, while the works of mercy and charity over which he was engaged endeared him the more to the people, and aroused their enthusiasm.

Passing through the forum one day, he saw three youthful slaves exposed for sale. Loose tunics but partially concealed their lithe forms and shapely limbs; light flaxen hair hung down their shoulders, and the blue eyes in their fair faces glanced, half defiantly, half timidly, at the inquisitive crowd. Gregory drew near, and, struck with their beauty and grace, asked the dealer whence they came. "From Britain." "Are the people there Christian, or still in pagan darkness?" "Still pagan," said the merchant. "Ah! what a pity," replied Gregory, "that the Author of Darkness owns such fair faces, and that, with such grace of outward

form, they should lack inward grace." When asked the name of the nation, the dealer replied that they were Angles. "True," said Gregory, "for they have angelic faces, and should be co-heirs with the angels in heaven. What is the name of the province from whence they come?" "Deira." "Yes; de ira, snatched from ire, and called to the mercy of Christ. Who is their king?" "Alla." "Alleluia, the praise of God must be sung in those parts."

The story as told by Venerable Bede illustrates the playful humour of Gregory and his cheerfulness.[1] He spoke, however, in no mere light-hearted pleasantry, for the fair features of the Saxon youths haunted him that night in his cell on the Coelian, and stirred his sympathy and zeal. A thousand winsome faces in that far-off land looked towards him from their dark pagan rites; and in the morning he consulted his brethren, and went to Pope Benedict to plead the cause of our forefathers. His earnestness and eloquence moved the holy Father, who, however, represented the difficulty of finding men willing to undertake so hazardous a work as the conversion of that distant island, whereupon Gregory offered himself for the mission, and the Pope dismissed him for further consideration of the matter. At the rumour that Gregory had volunteered for foreign

[1] The first account of Gregory's meeting with the Angles appears in the *Life* written by an unknown monk of Whitby about the year 713, which is of special interest as giving an essentially English tradition with regard to the saint. In this *Life* the Angles do not appear as slaves exposed for sale, but as men visiting Rome of their own free will, whom Gregory had expressed a wish to see. It is Ven. Bede in his *History* who first makes them slaves.

service, representatives of both clergy and laity implored the Pope not to deprive Rome of so holy and valuable a man; but the persistence and entreaties of Gregory prevailed over all objections, and he extracted a reluctant consent from the Pope, accompanied with a blessing and prayers for the success of the mission.

Rejoicing at the result of the interview with the Pope, Gregory secured the co-operation of several of his brethren in the monastery, and to prevent any hindrance or reversal of the permission, he hastily and secretly made all preparations, and the little band of apostles crept out of the city at night for the conversion of our country. As soon as their departure became known, a popular tumult arose. Endeared to the hearts of the people, they resented Gregory's departure and loudly clamoured for his recall. They organised, separated into three bodies to waylay the Pope as he went to St Peter's, and on the appearance of the holy Father they surrounded him, shouting, "Apostolic Father, what have you done?" "You have offended St Peter," "You have ruined Rome." "Why did you let Gregory go?" The Pope, accepting the popular feeling in favour of Gregory as the expression of the will of God, yielded not unwillingly to their noisy persistence, and despatched messengers to recall their favourite. The band of missionaries had advanced three days on their apostolic journey, and were resting in a field while Gregory read to his companions seated around him. A wandering locust settled upon the open book, which Gregory looked upon as a sign—locusta, *quasi loco sta*—of some check to his mission, and hurriedly arose for a fresh

start. At that moment the messengers of the Pope appeared and eagerly announced their tidings. Gregory at once obeyed, reluctantly retracing his steps, and returned to the monastic routine in his cell at St Andrew's as if nothing had happened.

This episode reveals the sterling character of Gregory. No one better understood the nature of the work that he had undertaken. For a man of culture and refinement to cast his lot among warlike, uncivilised barbarians in a distant unknown land, evinced a degree of sacrifice and zeal for souls that amounted to heroism. He loved his cell, his quiet days of contemplation, his hours of study; yet he willingly renounced "his harbour" for a life of anxiety and turmoil for the good of souls. He heeded not obstacles or danger, weakness of frame or absence of resources, but cast himself upon divine Providence, knowing that God provides health and strength and means for his workmen. He speedily made the resolve, and nothing deterred him from its rapid execution; amid objection, difficulty, and persuasion, he did not swerve from his purpose. His earnestness swayed a reluctant Pope, his eagerness and enthusiasm communicated itself to his brethren, and induced them to join in a mission full of peril and uncertainty. Then, in the full tide of hope, in the very outset of the journey, how noble was his humble submission to the voice of authority, his resignation at the failure of the project, and his unobtrusive resumption of his monastic duties. These are the heroes of the Cross of Christ, conquering the world, despising honours, relinquishing wealth, courting hardship and suffering, seeking labours,

spurning difficulties, and subduing self for love of Christ.[1]

[1] There has been much discussion as to whether Gregory and his fellow monks at St Andrew's followed the rule of St Benedict. Baronius and others on his authority have denied this, while it has been asserted as strongly by Mabillon and by the Bollandists, who, in the preface to the *Life of St Augustine* (May 26), retract the opinion expressed earlier in the preface to St Gregory's *Life* (March 12). The controversy is important only in view of its bearing on the question as to the form of monasticism introduced into England by St Augustine. There is no object in going into the matter here, but it may be mentioned that, as a result of modern researches—especially those of the learned Cardinal Pitra—the view of Baronius is now practically abandoned.

CHAPTER III

NUNCIO AND SECRETARY

For ten years the Lombards had harassed Italy. Masters of one half of the kingdom, they kept the imperial half in a state of constant alarm and uncertainty: they hovered on its confines, made frequent raids on towns and villages, and at times even threatened Rome, cutting off its supply of provisions. No regular force opposed them in the field, for the Exarch, with the few Roman troops then in Italy, remained inactive and safe within the walls of Ravenna. Urgent appeals to Constantinople brought no help, for the Persian wars occupied the imperial army, and other interests engrossed the imperial mind. The Romans craved even for food: "If you are unable to deliver us from the swords of the Lombards, save us, at least, from the calamity of famine," an appeal which drew a supply of corn from Egypt. The relief was but transient, and the Romans gathered together the remains of their opulence, and sent the Patrician Pamplonius with 3,000 pounds of gold to Constantinople to plead the cause of Italy. Tiberius, unable to supply forces, and too just to appropriate the gold, applied it to the defence of the city.

Meanwhile the Lombards continued their depredations, and Pope Pelagius determined to send Gregory as Apocrisiarius or Nuncio to the Byzantine Court,

trusting that his talents, business capacity, and sanctity might influence the Emperor, and that he might be able to take advantage of any favourable turn. In the year 578, therefore, Gregory left his peaceful home on the Coelian and sailed for the imperial capital, accompanied by several of his monks. Either the novelty of the sea journey, or an unpleasant experience of tempestuous weather, deeply impressed the mind of Gregory, for his writings abound in allusions to the sea, and in metaphors taken from a sailor's life. After the weary and irksome confinement in a ship, no one could repress a feeling of security and delight on first approaching the magnificent city of Constantinople, with its marble palaces and glistening domes, rising out of the swift waters of the Bosphorus into the clear blue of an Eastern sky. The luxury of old Rome, transferred to Constantinople, had become more voluptuous and enervating from the wealth, climate, and customs of the East. Into the splendour and magnificence of the court, into apartments provided in the palace of Placidia, an adjunct of the magnificent imperial palace, came Gregory in his coarse habit to pray, to fast, to study, and to continue the monastic routine of St Andrew's.

For this purpose it was that he brought the monks, for he deeply regretted the severance from his monastery. "On the most secure coast," he writes, "a storm tosses a ship carelessly moored: again am I plunged into the sea of secular cares under an ecclesiastical pretext, and by losing the peace of the monastery I now know its value, for when I had it I did not sufficiently treasure what requires the greatest

care to preserve." And speaking of his brethren then with him: "By their example I am moored as with the cable of an anchor, while I am tossed by the restless billows of worldly affairs, and I fly to their society as to the bosom of a secure harbour from the huge waves of earthly business." [1]

Gregory conducted his delicate task with his accustomed thoroughness. He gained the good will of officials, made friends with persons of influence, and won the respect of the Emperor. Inability rather than unwillingness prevented Tiberius from sending an army to Italy, still Gregory constantly reminded him of the state of the country. On October 4, 580, Pope Pelagius wrote: "Whatever is necessary for you to know we have committed to the notary Honorius, whom, with our fellow bishop Sebastian, we have sent to your Excellence, and since he has lived at Ravenna with the illustrious Patrician Decius, his report will acquaint you with everything, and you can represent to the Emperor whatever you think necessary. The evils and calamities caused by the treacherous Lombards against their oath are so numerous that it is impossible for anyone to recount them. How we have received our brother, the aforesaid Sebastian, and the affection that we have shown him at your suggestion, you will learn from his report. He has also promised to lay before our most clement lord, the Emperor, the wants and perils of Italy. Confer together and consider how you can best help us in our dangers, for the State is reduced to such a condition, that unless God inspires the heart of the most clement Prince to bestow his mercy on

[1] *Praef. Moralium.*

his children, and to deign to send us at least a general and a duke, we are abandoned in our straits. The Roman territory especially is destitute of any garrison, for the Exarch writes that he cannot possibly send us any assistance, since he has not, he asserts, sufficient forces to defend his own neighbourhood. God grant that the Emperor may quickly assist us in our danger before the army of this detestable nation takes possession, which God forbid, of the places that remain to the Empire. Do not delay to send to us, by the help of God, the priest, for it is well known that his presence is necessary both for your own monastery and for the work we have entrusted to him."[1]

In 576, at the death of John the Scholastic, Patriarch of Constantinople, the people clamoured for the return of Eutychius. Twelve years previously he had been driven from the Patriarchal See for his opposition to Justinian, and he had retired to a monastery in Pontus, where he gained a reputation for sanctity by his charity and miracles. He collected and distributed large alms to relieve the victims of the famine caused by the ravages of the Persians, his stores of grain were miraculously replenished, and he cured many diseases by the application of blessed oil. On his entry into Constantinople he received an ovation; the people met him with branches in their hands, and welcomed him with hymns and acclamations while he modestly rode through the streets on an ass. In the evening the city was illuminated, the

[1] *John the Deacon*, i 32. The priest referred to was Maximianus, Abbot of St Andrew's, who suffered shipwreck on the voyage home, as related by Gregory in the *Dialogues*.

air was fragrant with perfumes, and festivities and rejoicings testified to the popular feeling. On Sunday, October 3, 577, so great a number crowded into the church of St Sophia to receive communion from his hands, that he was six hours distributing the Blessed Sacrament. He was enthroned in the patriarchal chair to the great delight of the people.

On Gregory's arrival, in 578, he paid his respects to the Patriarch, and their mutual piety and learning served as a basis of sympathy and a bond of friendship. Zeal for the truth, however, made them friendly antagonists. In the course of some sermons Eutychius taught that after the general resurrection our bodies would no longer be palpable, but become more subtle than air. This remnant of the errors of Origen he subsequently published in a book. Gregory, jealous for the integrity of the faith, remonstrated with the Patriarch, and held several private conferences with him to discuss the matter. Gregory urged the condition of our Lord's body after the Resurrection. *Feel and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see me to have.*[1] Eutychius replied that our Lord so acted in order to remove from the minds of his disciples all doubt of the Resurrection. "It is strange," said Gregory, "that our doubt should spring from that which removed the doubts of the disciples, and that the same thing should confirm the faith of the disciples and destroy ours." "His body that he showed to the disciples was palpable," replied Eutychius, "but when he had confirmed the faith of those who touched it, all that was palpable became again subtle."

[1] Luke xxiv 39.

Gregory urged the text, *Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more*,[1] whence he concluded that no further change took place after the Resurrection. To this Eutychius objected *that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God*.[2] Gregory replied that "flesh and blood" may be taken in two senses, either as signifying human nature generally, or the corruption of sin, and adduced arguments to show that in heavenly glory the nature of flesh remains, but is free from the infirmities of this life. When, after long discussion, they were unable to agree, the Emperor Tiberius summoned them both into his presence, privately heard the arguments on either side, and in the end decided that the book of Eutychius should be burned.

Soon after, both Gregory and Eutychius were attacked by serious illness. The humble Partriarch retracted his error. Tiberius visited him, and the holy man foretold not only his own death but that of the Emperor. Gregory, unable to leave his bed, sent some of his friends to convey his sympathy and affection for the dying Patriarch; Eutychius gratefully received this mark of friendship, and, grasping one of his emaciated hands with the other, exclaimed, "I acknowledge that we shall all rise again in this very flesh." He died on Low Sunday, 582, and was succeeded by John the Faster.

According to the prediction of Eutychius, Tiberius did not long survive him. In August he fell sick, the disease developed rapidly, and he had scarcely time to summon the Patriarch and Senate to witness the bestowal of his crown and his daughter on

[1] Rom. vi 9. [2] 1 Cor. xv 50.

Maurice. The new Emperor, 43 years of age, had been a successful general in the Persian wars. Simple in habits, affable in manner, reserved in disposition, he strove to rule himself as well as his subjects; with great self-command he rarely unfolded himself, until he read the heart he withheld his confidence, at times his justice verged on cruelty and his clemency inclined to weakness. He treated Gregory with respect and affection, and honoured him by appointing him as godfather to his son. This friendly intercourse resulted in a more active interference in the affairs of Italy. Maurice induced more than one Frankish chief to espouse the cause of the Romans, and placed the passes of the Alps at the disposal of the Franks. He sent 50,000 gold pieces to Childebert, who organised three invasions of Italy. But the Lombard King Autharis withstood the three onsets through want of union between the Imperial and Frankish troops, and triumphantly marched down Italy to Reggio, where he struck with his lance the column in the sea that marked the extreme south, exclaiming, "Here ends the Lombard kingdom." Gregory could not counteract the mistakes of generals, but his influence at the Byzantine Court kept alive the interest in the course of events in Italy. Troops could not be spared, for the whole Imperial army was employed in repelling barbarians on the frontier, and in the feebleness and straits of the Empire, it seemed the wisest policy to persuade Childebert, King of a Catholic nation, to an alliance against the Arian Lombards. The incapacity of the generals and the cruelty of the Franks were not anticipated.

During the six years of Gregory's sojourn at Con-

stantinople he continued the exercises of the cloister with his small community of monks. He contracted friendship with many holy men, and amongst others with St Leander of Seville, who came to seek the Emperor's assistance on behalf of Hermenegild, who had lost wife, crown, and liberty for the faith. Gregory found in St Leander a kindred spirit, to whom he could open his inmost soul; he laid bare his heart to his friend, and told him of his own weaknesses and shortcomings, how he had struggled long against conversion until compelled by divine grace to take refuge in a monastery, and how much he feared and lamented being again mixed up in business. He occupied his spare time in study, and commenced an exposition of the book of Job for the benefit of his monks, at which St Leander attended. He began it in conferences by word of mouth, later dictated the discourses as homilies, and finally, at the request of St Leander, he remodelled the whole into thirty-five books as a commentary on Job. It took the name of the *Morals of Job* or the *Morals of St Gregory*, because he used the text as a basis upon which to construct a complete course of Christian ethics. He took the version of St Jerome as a text, but occasionally quoted the more ancient version, because, as he said, the Roman Church makes use of both. The work has been held in the highest esteem in the Church.

By his stay at Constantinople Gregory gained much experience that proved of value to him in later years. He became acquainted with the leading bishops of the East, was able to master the working and the wants of the Eastern Church, and to observe

its tendencies, the character of its teaching, and its tone of thought. He secured the goodwill of influential persons at the Byzantine Court; he saw something of the intrigues, subterfuges and evasions that pervaded its policy; he discovered the weakness and the perils of the Empire; and he gauged the influence of climate, luxury, and absolute rule on the manners and morals of Eastern people. He saw the machinery of government, the exigencies of the Empire, the drain upon its resources, and could estimate the help that might be expected in the distracted state of Italy. Smaragdus, the Exarch of Ravenna, came to terms with the Lombards, who agreed to respect the territorities of the Exarchate. Rome was thus freed from alarm, and Italy tasted some moments of peace. Pope Pelagius took advantage of the more settled state of affairs to recall Gregory to assist him in dealing with the schismatical bishops of Istria. Amid the regrets of the Court he left Constantinople for the monastery of the Coelian in 548, and was succeeded as Apocrisiarius by Laurence, the Archdeacon of Rome.

On his return Pope Pelagius employed Gregory as his secretary. For some forty or fifty years strong feeling and violent action had prevailed on the question known in history as the "Three Chapters," which consisted of the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the writings of Theodoret in favour of Nestorius against St Cyril, and a letter of Ibas to Maris. The Council of Chalcedon, to which they were submitted in 451, abstained from passing any judgement upon them. This was construed into approval, and after a long and acrid controversy the

fifth General Council of Constantinople formally condemned the Three Chapters in 553. Far from allaying the dispute, this caused a partial schism in the West, for many bishops alleged that the decision of the Council of Constantinople was irreconcilable with that of Chalcedon. Paulinus, the bishop of Aquileia, headed the party, and was joined by the Metropolitans of Venice and Istria, the Archbishop of Milan, and some bishops in Illyria, Rhaetia, and Noricum. They held a Synod at Aquileia in 555, and condemned the fifth Oecumenical Council of Constantinople. The troubled state of Italy during the previous twenty years had rendered it difficult to deal with the schismatical bishops, but the prospect of peace induced Pope Pelagius to strive to heal the differences, and for that purpose he sent for Gregory. In the name of the Pope, Gregory addressed to the bishops of Istria three letters, which are models of ecclesiastical dignity and clear, temperate reasoning.

In the first he respectfully exhorts the bishops to return to unity, reminding them of the command received by Peter to confirm his brethren, and of the promise that his faith should not fail, and urged that as the first four general councils gained their force and authority from the confirmation of the Pope, so also did the fifth. He concludes by asking them to send some brethren to discuss the matter, promising them welcome and safe return. The letter was delivered by Bishop Redemptus and Quemdeusvult, Abbot of St Peter's. The bishops, who declined to enter into the question, replied that the writings quoted were not trustworthy, that the matter had already been decided, and that they did not need

further enlightenment. The genuine acts of the Council accompanied the second letter, which complained of this method of procedure, urged that St Leo, whose authority they admitted, approved only of the doctrines of faith decided by the Council of Chalcedon, quoted the marks of unity laid down by St Augustine and St Cyprian, and concluded by saying, "If you are not persuaded, send us competent persons to whom we can explain our reasons, as we have requested of the Exarch Smaragdus. If you fear the length of the journey, or the disturbed state of the country, the bishops could assemble at Ravenna, and we shall send our legates there to give you satisfaction." The bishops, with more obstinacy than good faith, replied again that the matter was already settled, and thought rather that the Pope should adopt their views. In the third letter, Gregory, in the name of the Pope, treated fully the whole controversy of the condemnation of the Three Chapters, explained lucidly the arguments in favour of the Council, and refuted the objections urged against it. This letter proved equally fruitless. The Patriarch of Aquileia died, and Smaragdus sent a force to Gradus, seized the new Patriarch, together with Severus, Bishop of Trieste, John, Bishop of Parenzo, and Vindemius, Bishop of Ceneda, took them violently to Ravenna, and kept them in prison for a year. With threats of exile and other inconveniences, he finally induced his prisoners to accept the fifth General Council, and to communicate with John, the Catholic bishop of Ravenna. He then set them at liberty, but the other bishops would not receive them on their return; they consequently held another

Synod, in which they retracted their acceptance of the fifth General Council.[1] After these efforts of persuasion by the Pope and force by the Exarch, the controversy lapsed for a time and the schism continued. Smaragdus was superseded the following year, probably on account of his violence to the bishops.

Meanwhile Gregory, having now regained his "harbour" in the monastery on the Coelian, devoted himself to prayer, study, and mortification. His brethren, aware of his talents and capacity, elected him their abbot on a vacancy, and he again became the head of his ancestral home. In his new position he directed his customary energy to the spiritual and temporal advancement of his community. Setting an example to all, he encouraged a spirit of prayer and study, at the same time exacting discipline and observance, tempered by a charity that drew to him the hearts of his subjects. On originally taking possession of the palace the monks had adapted a room to serve as a temporary chapel, but this proving inadequate for the monastic ceremonial, Gregory determined to erect a suitable church. He laid the foundations in 589, and himself superintended the progress of the work. The present church of San Gregorio on the Coelian occupies the exact site of the church built by Gregory, the piers and principal walls of which are incorporated in the existing church. Nothing remains of the old monastery that can be identified with any certainty. There is a well to which St Peter Damian alludes as used by Gregory and a room off the present church claims to be his

[1] *Paul the Deacon. De gestis Langobard.*, iii 26.

cell; in this is preserved a marble chair and bedstead that tradition asserts to have belonged to the saint.

Towards the close of the year 589 Rome suffered from excessive rains, the Tiber overflowed its banks and inundated the lower parts of the city, causing great destruction and distress. The waters stood stagnant for a considerable time, and, when they gradually ebbed away, they left a slime in the houses and streets that engendered a fearful pestilence. Numbers fell victims to the plague. In January the disease attacked Pope Pelagius, who lingered for a time, but died of it on February 8, 590. At this vacancy in the chair of St Peter the thoughts of all reverted to Gregory. Conspicuous for his ability and capacity, conversant with the course of ecclesiastical affairs, of undoubted holiness of life, of good family, friendly with the Emperor, he seemed to the clergy and patricians eminently fitted for the exalted position. The people had long shown their reverence and affection for him, alike in his secular office of praetor and in his ecclesiastical ministrations in their midst, they had prevented his mission to England, and his popularity was unbounded. The election consequently turned unanimously in favour of Gregory, no one else being thought of. He resisted to the utmost, pointed out his utter unworthiness, that he had already fled from the world on account of his weakness in combating it, and that it would endanger his salvation to compel him again to undertake secular occupation. Seeing no hope of influencing the electors, Gregory relied on his friendship with the Emperor to induce him to refuse approbation. In those times the free election rested with the clergy,

senate, and people, but before consecration it was customary to submit the name of the Pontiff elect to the Emperor for approval, and Gregory wrote in the most urgent terms to Maurice, entreating him for a multiplicity of reasons to oppose the choice. He at the same time sent letters to John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, and other friends at the Byzantine Court, to urge them to take up his cause with the Emperor, and afterwards complained that none of them had the charity to help him in his difficulties. Germanus, the governor of Rome, foreseeing that Gregory would make every effort to gain over the Emperor, sent messengers to waylay Gregory's envoys, secured and opened his letters, and despatched his own couriers with all possible speed with the decree.

During these preliminaries of the election the plague made terrible ravages amongst the population of the city, and the panic and affliction increased so as to cast aside further thought of the election. Nothing could check the course of the pestilence; rich and poor, old and young were stricken down; strong men attacked by it died in a few hours; bodies remained unburied, and increased the mortality; fear paralysed all efforts to control it, and the panic added to the death-roll. Gregory retained his calmness and self-possession; he organised regular assistance, and sent his monks over the city, using entreaties, commands, and threats to induce the unhappy people to adopt precautionary measures. Still the pestilence did not abate. The substance of one of his discourses at the church of St Sabina is preserved by St Gregory of Tours: "It is natural for us, my dearest brethren, to

tremble at the scourge of God when we see and feel it, but we ought to have feared it before it came. Affliction opens for us the road to conversion, and punishment softens the hardness of heart under which we suffer; as the Prophet foretold, the sword has reached even to the soul. Behold the whole population stricken by the sword of Heaven's wrath, while men are destroyed by the sudden stroke of death. Sickness, indeed, comes not before death, for you see how death anticipates the delay of sickness. Each one when smitten is carried off before he can turn to repentance. Think, therefore, how is he to meet the gaze of the terrible Judge, who has had no time to atone for what he has done? Individuals alone do not perish, all fall together; houses are empty, fathers see the burial of their children, and their heirs precede them in death. Let each one of us therefore take refuge in tears of repentance while there is time to weep before we are struck down. Let us call back to our minds whatever evil we have committed, and, by weeping, let us atone for our sins. Let us come before his face in confession, and, as the Prophet admonishes, let us lift up our hearts and our hands to the Lord. To lift up our hearts and hands to God is to excite the earnestness of our prayer by the merit of good works. Truly he gives surety and confidence to our trembling, who tells us by the Prophet, *I will not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.* Let no one despair from the heinousness of his crimes: a three days' penance washed away the hardened sins of the Ninevites; the converted thief merited the reward of life in the very sentence of death. Let us change our hearts and

trust that we have received what we ask, for the Judge more speedily grants the petition when the suppliant has corrected his evil doing. Therefore, in the peril of so great an affliction, let us persist in clamorous tears. That importunity which is annoying to men, pleases the Judge of truth, for a good and merciful God desires that pardon should be exacted from him by prayer, and will not be angry as much as we deserve: for he says by the Psalmist, *Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*[1] He himself therefore is witness that he desires to have mercy on those who pray, since he tells us to pray."[2] He concludes by ordering a general procession to consist of seven different bodies, who were to meet at the church of St. Mary Major, and there to unite in prayer, humiliation, and lamentation in order to implore the mercy of God. The day was observed as a Sunday. The priests of each of the seven regions or districts assembled at a church in the district, and were there joined by those who were assigned to each procession. The clerics started from the church of SS Cosmas and Damian, the monks from that of SS Gervase and Protase, the nuns from SS Marcellinus and Peter, children from SS John and Paul, men from St Stephen, widows from St Euphemia, married women from St Clement's. These separate bodies wended their way through the plague-stricken city, singing penitential prayers, and carrying the relics of the saints and the picture of the Mother of God attributed to St Luke. During the hour that the procession lasted, Gregory of Tours states that eighty died of the

[1] Ps. xlix 15. [2] *Hist. France*, x 1.

pestilence. At the close of the procession tradition asserts that the Archangel Michael appeared over the mausoleum of Hadrian sheathing a sword, which announced the cessation of the plague. On the present castle of St Angelo the figure of an angel sheathing a sword commemorates the event. Another tradition relates that Gregory heard the angels singing the Paschal Anthem: *Regina coeli laetare, Alleluia; Quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia; Resurrexit sicut dixit, Alleluia;* to which Gregory added, on the inspiration of the moment, *Ora pro nobis Deum, Alleluia.*

At the cessation of the pestilence letters arrived from the Emperor. Maurice expressed his delight at the choice of the Romans, alleging that he would himself have selected Gregory, and ordered them to proceed at once with the consecration. Dismay took possession of the heart of Gregory. His humility shrank from the dignity; his estimate of his own weakness trembled at the responsibility; deserted by his friends at court, aware of the feelings of the Romans, and seeing no outlet, he determined on flight. Germanus suspected an attempt at escape and ordered the gates to be watched. Gregory, however, prevailed on some merchants to conceal him in a basket, and was thus carried unnoticed out of the city. For three days he wandered about woods and caves with scant food and exposed to perils from the Lombards. Without plans for the future, his one idea was escape; this abandonment of the past and disregard of the future, this courting danger and hardship to avoid honour and responsibility, reveal the depth of his humility and distrust of self. While

thus a voluntary outcast, the veneration and affection of the Romans showed itself in greater demonstrations than when he departed for the Anglo-Saxon mission, for they looked upon his self-sacrifice during the plague as the salvation of the city. The people broke out in loud lamentation at the discovery of his flight; it was deemed a national calamity, a fast was proclaimed, and, in prayers and tears, they crowded to the churches to implore God to restore their father to them. Messengers scoured the country in pursuit, and as evening fell on two days of fruitless search, their prayers and efforts redoubled. On the third day, as Paul the Deacon relates, the place of his concealment was discovered by the appearance of a pillar of fire over the cavern. When Gregory, with sinking heart and troubled mind, saw his captors approach, he reluctantly acquiesced in the will of God, and suffered them to lead him back to Rome. The joy of the people knew no bounds. They conducted him in triumph to the Confession of St Peter, and with the customary ceremonies he was consecrated on September 3, 590.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE PONTIFICAL PALACE

GREAT as was the change from the chair of the praetor to the cell at St Andrew's, the change from the latter to the chair of Peter was greater. In the one Gregory gave up civic dignity, ease, and wealth for seclusion and poverty; in the other he left the peaceful "harbour" and a life of prayer for the most intricate cares, the highest dignity, and the greatest responsibility on earth. On his shoulders were placed the trials and the troubles, the welfare and the dangers, the scandals and the contests, in things spiritual and temporal, not of one city or nation, but of the whole world; and that not at a time of peace and order, but in the transition between two civilisations. The responsibility of the vicegerent of Christ, which involves the government and protection of the Church in every nation, provides a burden heavy enough, but when increased by perpetual war, a distracted Italy, the contests of untamed Western races, and the encroaching Caesarism of the East, it is no wonder that the humble monk-Pope shrank from the prospect.

Sad indeed was the outlook for the Church, and one that needed the utmost energy and tact to face. In the immediate neighbourhood the Lombards, partly Arian, partly Pagan, ruled the larger portion of Italy with the sword, and their cruelty was a terror to Catholics in their own domains and a menace to

those on the confines; sees were vacant, churches deserted, clerics cast adrift. In Istria the schism of the Three Chapters separated the bishops from intercommunion. Beyond the Alps the lawlessness of the tribes led to corruption of morals, laxity of Church discipline, simony, and the intrusion of laymen into clerical offices. The British Church had fled before the conquering Saxon. In Spain, Arianism yet lingered; in Africa, the Donatists still made their power felt. In the East the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches prevailed in some churches and influenced others, while the constant interference of the Court of Constantinople in ecclesiastical affairs required the greatest vigilance, firmness, and tact.

Nor did the political horizon present a more cheerful prospect. Not a single nation could boast of a strong government or settled order. The Empire had relinquished its grasp on Gaul, Britain, and Spain, it contested Italy, retained Africa with feeble sway, and spent its strength in repelling invasions of Persians on the one side and Scythians and Suaves on the other. Three Frankish kingdoms replaced the old province of Gaul: Clothaire II. ruled Neustria, or West France; Childebert governed Austrasia, or East France, and part of Germany; and Gontran reigned over Burgundy in the south. These kingdoms were embroiled in intermittent warfare through the enmities and jealousies of the queens Frundegunde and Brunehalt. In England the petty States of the Saxons were occupied in quarrelling one with another and in driving the Britons westward. Spain, settling down under the Visigoths, with difficulty avoided war with the Franks. In Italy the Lombard Autharis,

victorious over the three invasions of the Franks, perpetually harassed the territories of the Empire; the Imperial generals retained their scant forces within the security of fortifications; the Emperor could supply neither arms nor men; and the Exarch, safe at Ravenna, would neither treat with the Lombards nor restrain their incursions, so that a series of raids, petty sieges, and plunder disorganised the whole country.

While the humility of Gregory trembled at the dignity and responsibility of his spiritual pre-eminence, his heart sank at the thought of the wants and wounds of the Church, and at the heritage of labour and trouble with kings and nations to which he had succeeded. His first letters after his consecration open to us the state of his mind. To John, the Patriarch of Constantinople, he writes: "If the essence of charity consists in the love of our neighbour, if we are ordered to love our neighbour as ourselves, why does not your holiness love me as yourself? I know how steadily and anxiously you tried to escape the burden of the episcopate, yet you have done nothing to prevent the same burden from falling upon me. It is clear that you do not love me as yourself, for you wish me to bear the burden which you were unwilling yourself to carry. Worthless and weak I have taken charge of an old ship very much battered; the waters break in everywhere, the rotten timbers creaking in the daily storm threaten shipwreck, hence I ask you for Almighty God's sake to give me by your prayers a helping hand in this danger." [1]

[1] Ep. i 4.

To his friend Narses he writes: "When you so beautifully picture the sweets of contemplation you renew my lamentations at my ruin, for I recall what I have lost when I was raised without merit to the highest dignity of government. Know that I am so stricken with grief that I can scarcely speak, a cloud of sorrow dims the eyes of my soul, everything looks gloomy, and what others think pleasant seems cheerless to my heart. . . . I feel, good sir, as if I had lost children, for through these earthly cares I have lost noble ends. *Call me not Noemi, that is beautiful, but call me Mara, for I am filled with bitterness.*" [1] "I think lightly of the congratulation of strangers on the dignity of the sacerdotal office," he says to his friend Paul the Scholastic, "but I am very much pained that you, who so fully know my heart, should congratulate me and think that I am exalted. The highest advancement for me would be to attain what I desire; if I really obtained my wish, which you have so recently heard, it would be to continue in my beloved contemplation." [2]

To Theoctista, the sister of the Emperor, he writes: "I am surprised that you have withdrawn your previous forbearance from me in speaking of the pastoral office, in which, under the pretext of the episcopate, I am sent back into the world, and in which I am occupied over as many earthly cares as I remember to have had in my secular life. I have lost the supreme delight of my seclusion, and am cast down internally, while outwardly I seem to have been exalted. Hence I lament that I have been banished far from the face of my Maker. I was striving daily

[1] Ruth i 20; Ep. i 6. [2] Ep. i 3.

to escape from the world and from the bonds of the flesh, to drive away bodily images from the eyes of the soul, and apart from the body to gaze on eternal joys . . . when suddenly in the revolution of events, borne on the whirl of this trial, I am cast down in fear and trembling, for even if I fear nothing for myself, I am terribly afraid for those who are committed to me. . . . I hastened to sit at the feet of the Lord with Mary, and to listen to the words from his lips, but now I am compelled with Martha to minister in externals, and to be troubled over many things. . . . To me these things are difficult and very burdensome, and what the mind does not willingly take to it cannot do fittingly. Behold our most serene Lord the Emperor has ordered an ape to become a lion; at his command he may, indeed, be called a lion, but he cannot become one."[1]

To Gregory the ex-Consul, who had been active in procuring his election, he writes: "I complain not lightly of your love, for you knew I sought seclusion, and you have led me into troubles. May Almighty God reward you eternally, because you have done it with a good intention; but may he, as far as he will, deliver me from the many dangers of this position, for, as my sins deserve, I am made bishop, not of the Romans, but of the Lombards, whose fair words are swords and whose favours are tortures. See where your patronage has landed me!"[2]

To St Leander he writes: "I fully intended to reply to your letter, but the pastoral charge so wears me with labour that I am more ready to weep than to speak. This your Reverence will carefully under-

[1] Ep. i 5. [2] Ep. i 31.

stand, if in the text of my letter I say anything thoughtlessly to you whom I love dearly. For I am so buffeted by the waves of the world in this position, that I cannot in any way bring into port the old and rotten ship, which by the hidden dispensation of God I have undertaken to govern. At one time the waves break against the prow, at another clouds of sea-foam surge over the sides, then again a squall bursts on the stern. In the midst of all this trouble I am obliged in trepidation to manage the helm: sometimes to tack sideways against the threats of the waves on the curved bulwarks of the ship; I groan, for I feel that if I am negligent the leak in the hold will increase, and should the tempest grow stronger the rotten timbers already forecast shipwreck. With grief I call to mind the placid shore of contemplation that I have left, and with sighs I gaze at the land which I cannot reach through adverse winds. If, therefore, dearest brother, you love me, give me a hand in these waves by your prayers; and as you help my labours, so in fair exchange may you become stronger in your own work." [1]

The depression and grief disclosed by these letters did not prevent Gregory from facing the difficulties of his position vigorously. His unaffected humility and low estimate of himself are no criterion of his capacity. He calls himself a "vile manikin," [2] "listless with idleness," [3] yet the activity of his mind and his increasing labours have commanded the admiration of posterity. Although he complains of the loss of interior recollection, he nevertheless continued

[1] Ep. i 43.
[2] *Praef. in Dial.*
[3] Ep. ix 121.

in prayer and contemplation in the midst of his activity and battling with cares. To natural ability, acquired gifts, and a profound mind, he added an energy and force of character truly Roman. He held tenaciously to his purpose, and although he employed surpassing tact and charity in dealing with abuses and opposition, he could be stern and unbending when necessity arose. In spite of his diffidence in himself, he occasionally asserts his firmness. "You know my ways, that I endure for a long time, but if once I have made up my mind not to endure, I cheerfully face any danger."[1] Unbounded charity tempered his energy and firmness, his fatherly consideration for those whom he felt constrained to reprove, and his gentleness towards every kind of affliction abound in his letters, which furnish touching proofs of the overflowing tenderness of his heart.

Amid these difficulties and in these dispositions, Gregory commenced his Pontificate. His first care was that of his own household. A monk in fact and a monk in heart, he had continued a monk's life in the Imperial palace at Constantinople, so now he arranged his own palace on the plan of the monastery. He dismissed the lay attendants who hitherto had ministered to the Pope and replaced them by clerics and monks: "In order that," as he writes, "he who takes the seat of government may have suitable witnesses, who, seeing his conduct in his private life, may imitate his example from the constant sight of his progress." Accustomed to a community life and the society of those who had given themselves to God, he called to his side as counsellors several of his brethren at St

[1] Ep. iv 47.

Andrew's: Maximianus the Abbot, whom he afterwards made Bishop of Syracuse; Augustine and Mellitus, two of the future missionaries to England; Marinianus, afterwards Bishop of Ravenna; Probus, whom later he sent to Jerusalem; and Claudius, Abbot of Classita, a commentator on the sacred Scripture. With these brethren he continued the duties of a religious life, divine office, prayer, common meals, and spiritual conferences. Amongst the clerics he chose Peter the Deacon, the interlocutor in his *Dialogues*, Emilianus the notary, who took down the forty homilies on the Gospels, Paterius the notary, John the defensor, and Januarius, Bishop of Malacita. He appointed the deacon Anatolius majordomo of the palace. The staff provided him with counsel and society. No name of any note occurs as living in Rome during his reign, hence although consulting and discussing all topics freely with these his familiars, his own master mind guided them and the Church.

In the appointments of the palace whatever smacked of luxury was rigidly excluded. The furniture was simple in the extreme, suitable rather for the rooms of the poor or the cells of monks. Distinctions of dress were discarded; coarse in texture, devoid of style or ornament, the livery was a monastic habit. The pontifical robes of state betokened modesty rather than splendour; "although we do not care for presents, we have thankfully received the handworked robes that your Fraternity has sent us, but that you may suffer no loss we have sold them for a fair price which we forward to your Fraternity."[1] "The

[1] Ep. i 66.

ornaments of a Bishop," he writes, "should be purity, uprightness, charity, learning: for pomp, luxury, precious or soft garments are the insignia of proud courtiers and lascivious women rather than of bishops, the successors of the Apostles." His table corresponded with the other surroundings—a spare, simple diet, taken in common. He gave strict orders that all bad customs should be eliminated, especially those that savoured of simony. He spared not himself, took no privileges, and ruled his household rather by example than by authority. While relinquishing no monastic occupation, he neglected no pontifical duty.

This monastic court round the throne of the monk-Pope brought respect and authority to the monks. In the eyes of the Romans it was a public recognition of their state and value; they were not merely a secluded body seeking safety and sanctity under a rough garb, for Gregory placed them in prominent positions, and employed them in every department of the government of the Church. Bishops, missionaries, and ambassadors were freely chosen from their midst. His system created an atmosphere of intellectual culture in the pontifical court; nobility, wealth, worldly refinement were no credentials for admittance to the *entourage* of the Pontiff. A student himself, Gregory encouraged learning and acquirements, and he assigned positions in his palace to those only who excelled either in sanctity or in some of the liberal arts. This gave an impetus to Roman studies which had suffered much from the continued temporal disasters, interest in philosophy revived, and a general movement commenced towards the attainment of knowledge.

Piety and devotional exercises had sensibly decreased on account of the sieges and military operations, and Gregory strove to restore the religious fervour of the Roman people. Noticing that during the pestilence the processions and litanies had caught the popular feeling, he revived the ancient devotion of the Stations. The people, with the Pontiff and part of the clergy, assembled at a chosen basilica, where they were marshalled in good order, Gregory on horseback, the rest on foot, and all went in procession to another basilica, where solemn Mass was celebrated and the Pontiff pronounced a homily. The terminus of the common pilgrimage, called the Church of the Station, was that of some saint, the commemoration of whose death, burial, or translation occurred on that day, hence the term "Natalitia." At these Stations Gregory delivered his homilies on the Gospels, and perhaps his Sacramentary. When ill-health prevented him from speaking, one of the clerics read them in his presence. The homilies were written in simple diction, with a paternal affection and sweetness pervading every chapter; the allegorical method of the explanations according with the inclination and genius of the time. The easy and earnest application of the Gospel to the ordinary duties of a Christian life, and the extraordinary fame of their author, caused them to be received with eagerness and to be read in all the churches of the West.

John the Deacon relates a miraculous occurrence that took place at one of these Stations. "While Gregory was celebrating Mass at one of the public Stations a matron made the customary offerings. After the consecration he was in the act of giving her

communion, and while repeating the usual form, 'The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul,' the woman smiled. At once withdrawing his hand from her mouth he placed the particle of our Lord's Body on the altar. After the Mass he publicly asked the matron why she presumed to laugh when about to receive the Body of our Lord. She hesitated for a long time, and at length said, 'Because I knew that I made with my own hands the bread that you offered me as the Body of our Lord.' Then Gregory, on account of the incredulity of the woman, knelt with all the people in prayer, and on rising after a short time found that the particle which he had placed on the altar had assumed the appearance of flesh. By showing it to the incredulous matron before all, he was able to recall her to the grace of belief, and to confirm the faith of the people. Kneeling again in prayer the flesh reassumed the appearance of bread." [1]

Besides delivering the homilies at the Stations, Gregory frequently preached in the churches of the city, for he considered that it was one of the chief duties of the pastor to provide spiritual food for his flock. He explained several books of the Scripture in public, although his homilies on the Gospel and on Ezechiel are the only ones extant. His earnest, effective style riveted the attention. "Nothing too effeminate, nothing too ornate, but simple and chaste without pretence, without extravagance; weighty words, dignified sentences suited to the majesty of sacred Scripture and the dignity of the priesthood": so the author of the Benedictine life describes it.[2] In

[1] *John the Deacon*, ii 41. [2] *Vita S Greg.*, ii 8.

a happy, easy manner he readily interweaves the testimony of Scripture throughout the discourses. They sparkle with life and interest by the introduction of illustrations from the actions of holy men and the events of the time.

The supervision of his many works of charity occupied an important part of his daily routine. The interest and even eagerness with which he entered into tales of distress not only indicate his overflowing charity, but leave the impression that benevolence was his recreation. He received strangers and the poor hospitably, not merely inviting, but compelling them to sit at his table. His genial affability extended to all without exception, so that no one might be afraid to approach him; he paid the utmost deference and respect to the aged, whom he called fathers. His exquisite delicacy and consideration in the manner of bestowing alms took away all shame in asking or accepting. He had a tender compassion for the needy of good family, whom the vicissitudes of the time had reduced to veiled distress: he strained every effort to preserve their honour, relieving them secretly, and alleging that the gift came, not from himself, but from St Peter, from whom it was an honour to receive anything. He did not wait for applications, but sought out the poor in concealment and under obscure roofs, and would blame them if fear or shame deterred them from asking, inasmuch as they deprived him of the chance of an act of charity. A poor man died of starvation in the streets of Rome, and Gregory abstained from saying Mass for some days, as if blame attached to him for the death.

To supply his many charities he did not hesitate to use the ecclesiastical revenues; he collected corn from the patrimony of the Church, and received alms from various parts of the world, acknowledgements of which are found in his letters. His biographer calls the Church a "general barn." He superintended the supplies of corn himself, as his letters frequently testify. "With fifty pounds of gold," he writes to his agent in Sicily, "buy new corn from strangers and store it in Sicily in places where it will not perish, so that in February we may send ships sufficient to carry the corn to us. But in case we fail to send them, provide the ships yourself, and, with God's help, send the corn in February."[1] Every month he ordered a general distribution to the poor of corn, wine, oil, meat, cheese, and vegetables. Every day he sent round carts of victuals and cooked food for the sick, and he kept voluminous lists of the poor, which were extant in the Lateran at the time of John the Deacon. He had fixed days for the more solemn distribution to the clergy, monasteries, and hospitals; at Easter dawn he assembled the clergy and officials, and with a kiss of peace made them a present of gold; he also bestowed gifts of money on the feast of SS Peter and Paul (June 29), the anniversary of his consecration (September 3), and the feast of St. Andrew (November 30), and on the two first he added clothing. Every day he provided a meal in his palace for twelve poor persons, at which he himself frequently assisted. The well-known legend of the miraculous appearance of a thirteenth at table is thus told by John the Deacon:

"When they had sat down the Pope, looking at

[1] Ep. i 72.

the table, counted thirteen, and calling the attendant, inquired why he presumed to admit thirteen against his order. Somewhat puzzled he more carefully counted the guests, and finding only twelve, replied with confidence, 'Believe me, holy Father, there are only twelve as you ordered.' During the meal he frequently counted the same twelve, for he could not see the thirteenth, who was visible to the Pope only. The holy Father Gregory noticed that the man sitting nearest to him frequently changed his features, sometimes appearing young and sometimes old, with venerable grey hair. At the end of the repast he let the twelve go away, and, taking the thirteenth by the hand, led him into his room, and there pressed him to tell him his name. He replied, 'What makes you ask my name? Is it anything wonderful? However, refresh your memory, and you will recollect that I am that shipwrecked merchant who came to you while you were writing in your cell in the monastery on the hill Scaurus, and to whom you gave twelve coins and the silver dish which your mother, the blessed Sylvia, sent you with cooked herbs; and from that day I knew for certain, when you gave with such a cheerful heart, that the Lord had destined you to be the head of the Church and successor and vicar of blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, whose virtue you imitated in dividing the substance of the offerings according to the need.' On hearing this Gregory asked, 'And how did you know that the Lord had then destined me to rule his Church?' 'Because I am his angel, and was then commissioned by him to test your constancy.'" [1]

[1] *John the Deacon*, ii 23.

Gregory's personal dealings with the poor may be gathered from the following letter written to Secundus, an agent in Ravenna, whom he asked to admonish Marinianus, lately created bishop of that city: "Rouse up our brother bishop, Marinianus, by whatever terms you can, for I suspect that he is asleep. For some people came to me, and among them some aged beggars, whom I questioned about the persons from whom they had received anything, and they all told me how much they had received on their journey, and from whom. When I carefully asked them what the above brother had given them, they replied that they had asked him, but had received nothing at all from him, so that they did not get even bread for their journey, which it was always the custom in that church to give to everyone. They said, 'He answered us, I have nothing that I can give you.' I am surprised that he who has clothes, and money, and cellars, has nothing to give to the poor.

"Tell him that with change of position he must also change his disposition. Let him not think that reading and prayer alone suffice, so that he may choose to sit secluded, and not bear any fruit with his hand; but let him have an open hand, let him sympathise with the necessities of those who suffer, let him think that the need of others is his own; for if he does not this, he bears the name of bishop in vain. In a letter I warned him about things concerning his soul, but since he has not answered me a single word, I fancy he has not deigned to read it. Wherefore it is useless to admonish him any more about these things, and I shall only write as a counsellor about secular cases, for I cannot be wearied by dictating letters to a man who will not read. Do you there-

fore speak to him privately about all these things, and admonish him how he ought to behave, lest by present negligence he lose his former goodness, which God forbid."[1]

Thus prayer, study, the services of the Church, preaching, and works of charity engaged his attention, in addition to the numberless business affairs, lay and ecclesiastical, that appertained to his high office. He thus speaks of his business occupations: "In the monastery I was able to restrain my tongue from useless talk, and to keep my mind almost continually intent on prayer. But after I placed the pastoral burden on the shoulders of my heart the soul could not concentrate itself, because it must wander over many things. For I am compelled to examine into cases, sometimes of churches, sometimes of monasteries, and often to deliberate upon the lives and actions of individuals. Sometimes I have to take up the affairs of the citizens, sometimes to groan under the invading swords of the barbarians, sometimes to fear the wolves that steal into the flock committed to me. Sometimes I have to take precautions lest any should be deprived of help by those whose duty it is to assist, sometimes to endure plunderers with equanimity, sometimes to resist them for the sake of preserving charity. When the mind is dissipated and torn to pieces by such and so many thoughts, how can it be induced, even when it does return to itself, to compose itself sufficiently for preaching, or be deterred from giving up the ministry of delivering the word of God?"[2] This description of his public cares, in his own graphic words, fills up the sketch of his daily routine.

[1] Ep. vi 30. [2] *Hom. in Ezech.*, xi 6.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST SYNOD

At the accession of a pontiff his first duty to the Church is to notify his election to his fellow bishops, to define his own orthodoxy, and to declare the faith under which he rules according to the traditions of the Fathers. For this purpose, during the ceremony of consecration, the Pontiff elect made a formal profession of faith; the one made by Gregory is given by John the Deacon,[1] and somewhat resembles the Nicene Creed. As soon as convenient after the consecration, it was customary to hold a synod of the neighbouring bishops, at which the Pontiff made known his faith to them, and from which he issued a synodical letter to those who were absent. The position of Gregory in the ecclesiastical government will be better understood by a brief outline of the relations between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the world.

The Sovereign Pontiff had a fourfold function. He was Bishop of Rome, Metropolitan over part of Italy, Patriarch of the West, and Primate with jurisdiction over the whole world subject to the Gospel. The hierarchy of Bishop, Metropolitan, and Patriarch developed gradually from the exigencies of distance and increase of work. As Bishop, Metropolitan, and

[1] *Vita S Greg.*, ii 2.

Patriarch over a portion of the Church, the Sovereign Pontiff retained for himself the jurisdiction that custom or consent had not assigned to others, at the same time holding the primacy over all as the successor of St Peter. Thus his connection with the bishops of the world varied in closeness according as they dealt with him as Metropolitan, Patriarch, or Primate. In the city of Rome itself he retained the jurisdiction and performed the functions of an ordinary bishop. The Prefecture of Italy, as the Italian province of the Empire was then called, contained five Metropolitan sees: Ravenna, for Flaminia and Emilia; Milan, for Liguria and North Italy to Genoa; Aquileia, removed during the Lombard invasion to the Island of Gradus, for Istria and Venetia; Cagliari, for Sardinia; and Salona, for West Illyricum. These five Metropolitans had closer relations with the Holy See than the others in the West: they required its express consent for the consecration of the Bishop, and were subject to special supervision in administration; the Bishop of Ravenna, moreover, was obliged to present himself at Rome for consecration and to attend synods. The remaining provinces of Italy came under the jurisdiction of the Pontiff himself as their Metropolitan, *viz.*, Latium and Campania; Tuscany and Umbria; Picenum, Valeria, and Samnium; Apulia and Calabria; Lucania and Bruttium; Sicily and Corsica. The bishops in these provinces were directly subject to the Holy See, were immediately under its supervision, required its consent for consecration, regularly assisted at the provincial synods at Rome, and periodically presented themselves before the Supreme Pontiff either on the festival of SS Peter and Paul,

or on the anniversary of the Pope's consecration. The bishops of Sicily paid their visits to Rome every three years, which Gregory extended to five on account of the difficulties of the journey through hostile country.[1]

The letters of Gregory clearly distinguish his position as Metropolitan in Italy. Writing to John, Bishop of Ravenna, he provides for the supervision of bishops of his own jurisdiction in the difficult access to Rome on account of the occupation of the intervening country by the Lombards. "Your Fraternity," he says, "will take charge of the bishops belonging to us, who are not able to come here through the interposition of the enemy. With this restriction, however, that they must not be summoned to Ravenna for their causes, lest in any way we seem to harass or fatigue them at this juncture. If anything blameworthy should occur amongst them, your Fraternity should admonish them by letter. But if, which God forbid, anything serious should take place, we wish you to refer it accurately to us, so that fortified by the testimony of your inquiry, after due deliberation we may, by the help of the Lord, decide what is conformable to law and the Canons."[2] To Syagrius, Bishop of Autun, he writes: "We have learnt that a certain Menas, a bishop of the diocese[3] of the Roman Church, who has fled from our jurisdiction to your city, has shown such levity in his conduct that the name of bishop has become to us the greater disgrace, and to him not an honour, but a burden.

[1] Ep. vii 22. [2] Ep. ii 35.

[3] The word "diocese" is used in a more extended sense than its present meaning.

Since we take shame to ourselves in learning things of him which we severely reprehend in priests of other provinces, your Fraternity will no longer allow him to stay there, but compel him to return to us as soon as possible. . . . Moreover, report states that a certain Theodore, a bishop from the diocese of our most reverend brother Constantius of the Church of Milan, in order to avoid his correction, has settled down in your city; we request your Fraternity diligently to seek him out and send him back to his bishop." [1]

North Africa belonged to the Prefecture of Italy, and its Metropolitan at Carthage was subject directly to the Holy See, sending delegates to announce his election and obtain confirmation of privileges. The other Metropolitan churches of the West were not so closely united to the Pontiff as those of the Prefecture of Italy. Their bishops held rather the position of Vicars Apostolic of the Holy See, to represent in distant countries the centre of the Church, the rights and fulness of authority of the Holy See. The bishops who held this pre-eminence were those of Arles in Gaul, Seville in Spain, Prima-Justiniana for the Latin part of East Illyricum, and Thessalonica for Greece and the Greek part of East Illyricum. Their privileges did not belong to the see, but to the person, and were renewed at each election. Thus all the West was directly united to Rome in the manner of a patriarchate, either by ordinary jurisdiction, by bishops immediately subject, by Metropolitans, or by Vicars Apostolic. The title of Patriarch of the West arose from an elimination of jurisdiction, in the same way that ordinary juris-

[1] Ep. ix 113.

diction was confined to Rome, and Metropolitan jurisdiction restricted to a part of Italy. Gregory himself, determining a question of jurisdiction, says: "If it is maintained that he has neither Metropolitan nor Patriarch, the answer is that his cause should be heard and decided by the Apostolic See, the head of all the churches, for which the aforesaid bishop is acknowledged to have petitioned." [1]

Originally in the East only three churches obtained the privileges of a Patriarchal See—Jerusalem, the seat of St James; Alexandria, the See of St Mark; and Antioch, for some time the chair of St Peter. When Constantinople became the centre of the Imperial government, its bishops, with the approval of the Emperor, took the title of Patriarch. The Popes at first protested against the assumption, gradually tolerated it, and in the end tacitly consented to it. Gregory undoubtedly recognised it. Over these Patriarchs the Pope claimed pre-eminence and exercised jurisdiction; the connection was not so close as that of the Metropolitans of the West, and was usually confined to questions of faith and cases of appeal. Gregory's letters clearly express his own opinion with regard to this authority. Writing to Natalis of Salona concerning a point of discipline, he remarks: "If any of the four Patriarchs had done this, such contumacy could not possibly have been passed over without the gravest scandal." [2] To John of Syracuse he writes: "Concerning what they say about the Church of Constantinople, who doubts that it is subject to the Apostolic See? which fact our most pious Lord the Emperor, and our brother, the bishop

[1] Ep. xiii 45, cap. ii. [2] Ep. ii 52.

of that city, do constantly acknowledge."[1] He thus speaks of the See of Peter to Eulogius of Alexandria: "In your letter your holiness has mentioned much that is gratifying about the See of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, saying that he still sits in it in his successors. I acknowledge, indeed, that I am unworthy not only of the honour of sitting over others, but even of being numbered amongst those who stand, but I gladly accept all that is said, because he who speaks to me of the chair of Peter, also sits in a chair of Peter, and since I do not care for personal honour, I am pleased, holy men, that what you bestow upon me you give to yourselves. For who does not know that the holy Church was founded on the stability of the Prince of the Apostles, who carried this stability of mind in his name, so that he was called Peter from a rock? To whom the voice of Truth said: *To thee will I give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*,[2] and again: *And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren;*[3] also: *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep.*[4] While, therefore, there were many Apostles, to ensure pre-eminence, authority was alone fixed in the seat of the Prince of the Apostles, which is one in three places. For he lifted up on high that seat in which he deigned to remain and finish this present life, he adorned that see to which he sent the evangelist his disciple, he established that see in which he sat for seven years, although he afterwards left it. Since, therefore, there is one and the same see over which by the Divine authority three bishops now preside, whatever I hear

[1] Ep. ix 12.
[2] Matt. xvi 19.
[3] Luke xxii 32.
[4] John xxi 17.

good about you I impute to myself. If you believe any good of me, impute it to your merits, for we are one in him who says: *That they all may be one, as thou Father in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.*"[1]

To John of Syracuse he writes: "Since his fellow-bishops are adverse to him, it is very doubtful whether he really and certainly said such things, for he admitted that he was subject to the Apostolic See: when any fault is found in a bishop I know not what bishop is not subject to it."[2] When writing to the Bishops of Numidia he calls the Church "a field which he has to cultivate and weed out the tares";[3] to the Patriarch Cyriacus of Constantinople he speaks of it as "a ship of which he is the pilot."[4] The Roman See is "the head of the faith,"[5] "placed over all churches by the authority of God,"[6] and he tells the Patriarch John of Constantinople that he "is raised to the government of the Church."[7]

With regard to jurisdiction in appeals the following letter declares Gregory's views: "For if they took the trouble to remember that it is in the ecclesiastical order in which the cause has arisen, they would refrain altogether from useless complaint, especially as the cause cannot be heard at the place where the aforesaid Abbot complained that he had suffered injustice from your predecessor, and where he still labours under it. This might possibly be urged if there had not been recourse to a higher tribunal, before which he has rightly asked that his cause should

[1] John xvii 21; Ep. vii 40.
[2] Ep. ix 59.
[3] Ep. i 77.
[4] Ep. vii 4.
[5] Ep. xiii 37.
[6] Ep. iii 30.
[7] Ep. v 18.

be determined. For do you not yourself know that the cause which arose between John the priest and our brother and fellow Bishop John, of Constantinople, was referred according to the canons to the Apostolic See, and there defined by our sentence? If, therefore, in the city where the prince resides a cause is brought under our cognisance, with much greater reason the controversy between you should be determined here after ascertaining the truth. Let not words of foolishness influence you, nor think that we wish any injury to your church."[1] These extracts from Gregory's own words clearly indicate the position as to jurisdiction, and help to explain his dealings with bishops. He exercised special jurisdiction over the bishops "belonging to us" in his own province, he respected the jurisdiction of the Metropolitans, and claimed general supervision and authority over the whole Church.

Gregory summoned the neighbouring bishops to a synod as soon as practicable after his consecration, and from it he addressed his synodical letter to the Patriarchs John of Constantinople, Eulogius of Alexandria, Gregory of Antioch, and John of Jerusalem, a document full of humility, zeal, and sense of responsibility. It commences: "When I consider that without any merit, and utterly against my own wish, I am compelled to carry the burden of the pastoral charge, a cloud of sorrow overshadows me, and my sad heart sees nothing but gloom. For what purpose is a bishop elected unless to plead for the sins of the people? With what confidence can I plead for the sins of others when I am not secure

[1] Ep. vi 24.

about my own? If anyone should ask me to plead his cause with a man of power, who is angry with him and unknown to me, I should at once reply, 'I cannot intercede for you, because I do not know him with sufficient intimacy.' If then I should hesitate to have the presumption to plead for a man before a man, what boldness is it not to undertake the position of intercessor for the people before God, whom I do not know intimately by the goodness of my life? I have still greater reason to fear, for we all well understand that when an unacceptable person is sent to plead, the mind of the injured one is provoked to greater anger, and I very much fear that through the addition of my guilt the faithful committed to me may perish, whose sins the Lord hath hitherto tolerated with forbearance. Even if I am able to suppress the fear, and to brace my appeased mind to the work of the Pontificate, I am deterred by the consideration of the immensity of the work. I ponder how much is required in every charge, how the ruler should be pure in thought, forward in work, discreet in silence, useful in speech, nigh to each one in sympathy, raised above all in contemplation, a partner through humility with those who do well, firm in the zeal of uprightness against the vices of delinquents. . . . Since *by the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confesssion is made unto salvation.*[1] I acknowledge that I accept and venerate the four Councils as the four books of the holy Gospels, viz., that of Nicea, in which the pernicious dogma of Arius is destroyed; that of Constantinople, in which the error of Eunomius and Macedonius is convicted; that of Ephesus, in which

[1] Rom. ix 10.

the wickedness of Nestorius is judged; and that of Chalcedon, in which the impiety of Eutyches and Dioscorus is condemned. I embrace them with all earnestness and keep them with the most exact fidelity. On them as on hewn stones the structure of the holy faith rises, and in them is contained the norm of all life and action, and whoever does not hold their entirety, even if he be a stone, lies outside the building. I equally venerate the fifth Council, in which the Epistle of Ibas, full of error, is condemned; in which Theodore, separating the person of the Mediator of God and man into two subsistencies, is convicted to have fallen into the perfidy of impiety; and in which the writings of Theodoret are refuted, who with the boldness of folly rebukes the faith of blessed Cyril. All persons whom the aforesaid venerated Councils condemn I condemn; those whom they venerate I embrace. Since they are established by universal consent, whoever presumes to loose what they bind, or to bind what they loose, destroys himself, not them. Whoever thinks otherwise let him be anathema."[1]

The Synod met at the Lateran during the month of February, 591, and Gregory delivered the customary address to the assembled prelates. The seventeenth Homily on the Gospels was spoken in Synod, and probably at this particular Council. His method of addressing his bishops left no ambiguity, he spoke to the point; without dwelling on the honours and privileges he fastens on their duties, and does not hesitate to expose their shortcomings. The scene may be imagined. The rectangular basilica with its massive

[1] Ep. i 25.

piers supporting the panelled roof, the arched windows under the roof shedding a subdued light, in front of the altar a semicircle of venerable bishops in their copes, beneath them the presbyters of the titular churches of Rome in planeta, the deacons of Rome in dalmatics, in the middle the ambo for the speaker and the open book of the Gospels, and the centre of all the prominent figure of the monk-Pope, for the first time speaking to his bishops, his heart sinking with diffidence, his features firm with responsibility, and his eyes glistening with zeal. He commented on the Gospel of the ripe harvest:

"Behold the world is full of priests, but it is hard to find labourers in the harvest of the Lord, for we undertake the sacerdotal office, but its work we neglect. Think over, dearest brethren, think over what is said: *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send labourers into his harvest.* Do you then ask for us that we may worthily work for you, that our tongue may not be sluggish in exhortation, that, after accepting the duty of preaching, our silence may not accuse us before the just Judge. . . . Many who acquire the right of government are eager to tear their subjects to pieces, they parade the terrors of power and injure those they should benefit; not having the bowels of charity they strive to appear lords and never reflect that they are fathers; they turn the position of humility into the pride of domination, and if outwardly they caress, inwardly they rage. *They come to you in the clothing of sheep, inwardly they are ravening wolves.*[1] What shall we do, I cannot say it without sorrow, what shall we do, O

[1] Matt. vii 15.

shepherds, who accept the hire and are not labourers? For we receive the fruits of the Church as our daily stipend, and we do not work for the eternal Church by preaching. Think what a condemnation it is considered in the world to receive payment for work without doing the work. We live by the offerings of the faithful, what do we do for the souls of the faithful? . . . What will it avail if, loving ourselves, we neglect our neighbours? Or again, what will it avail if, loving and zealous for our neighbour, we neglect ourselves? . . . This we should reflect on, that zeal against the evil acts of our neighbour should be so guided that the virtue of meekness be not lost. So that a priest ought not to be hasty and violent, but gentle, with determination of purpose. We ought to bear with those we correct, and correct those we bear with. . . . To you priests I speak with great grief, for we know that some of you have accepted gifts for ordaining, have sold spiritual graces, and with the guilt of sin have acquired temporal gain by others' iniquity. Why did you not recall to mind the voice of the Lord, saying, *Gratis you have received: gratis give?* [1] Why did you not bring before your eyes our Redeemer, who entered the temple, overturned the seats of the dove-sellers, and scattered the coin of the money-changers? . . . The day will come—it will surely come, and it is nigh at hand—when the Shepherd of shepherds will appear to arraign publicly the deeds of everyone, and he who now avenges the faults of subjects through their superiors will then avenge the sins of superiors with his own hand. Then he will enter the temple,

[1] Matt. x 8.

will himself make a scourge, and drive the wicked merchants from the house of God. . . . There is yet another thing, dearest brethren, that much afflicts me in the life of pastors; but lest what I say may seem offensive to anyone, I equally accuse myself of it, although I lie under it unwillingly and compelled by the necessity of the disturbed state of the country. We have lapsed into external occupations; we have accepted one thing as an honour and we do another thing in our actions. We have relinquished the ministry of preaching, and for our punishment, as I foresee, we are called bishops. We hold the title of honour and do not undertake the duties. Those who are committed to us desert God, and we are silent; they give themselves up to evil actions, and we hold not out the hand of correction; they perish daily in many iniquities, and we calmly watch them hurrying to hell. . . . The elect enter the heavenly kingdom cleansed by the hands of priests: the priests themselves, by an evil life, are doomed to eternal punishment. To what shall I liken bad priests unless to the baptismal water, which, washing away the sins of the baptised, despatches them to heaven, and is afterwards itself cast into the ditch? Let us fear these things, brethren, and conform our actions to our ministry. Let us daily attend to the remission of our own sins, lest we, by whom Almighty God forgives the sins of others, may be fettered by our own. Consider, without ceasing, who we are; think on our duty; think on the responsibility we have accepted, and daily make up the account we have to render to our Judge. . . . Carefully ponder over these things, brethren, with yourselves,

and apply these things to your neighbour; prepare to render to Almighty God the profits you have received from your business. But what we inculcate we shall more easily obtain for you by prayer than by speech. O God, who hast willed to call us as pastors to the people, grant, we beseech thee, that what we say with our human lips may have strength in thy sight."[1]

Gregory strove to induce the schismatical bishops of Istria to attend the synod. He knew that pride rather than ignorance prevented the healing of the schism, and endeavoured more by charity and promises than by controversy to persuade the bishops to seek for unity. Aware that they relied more or less on the support of the Emperor after their ill-treatment by Smaragdus, he previously obtained the consent of the Emperor to summon them to the synod, and then wrote to Severus of Aquileia: "A driver welcomes with intense relief the high road after the carriage has been toiling over rough bypaths, so there is greater grief over one who leaves the known way of truth than there had been joy over his former conversion, for it is a less sin not to know the truth than not to remain in it when known. To fall into a fault through error is one thing, it is another to perpetrate it with knowledge. If we were, indeed, filled with joy when you were previously incorporated in the unity of the Church, we are now the more grievously distressed at your severance from Catholic communion. In accordance with the command of our most Christian and Serene Lord, we urgently direct you by the bearer of these presents to come with

[1] *Hom.* xvii in *Ev.*

your suffragans to the threshold of blessed Peter the Apostle, in order that what is in doubt amongst you may, by the help of God, be decided in synod assembled." [1]

Anxious to avoid appearing at a council, the bishops hastily met at Maran, and at once sent an embassy to the Emperor Maurice with three petitions —one from the bishops subject to the Lombards, one from Severus and the bishops subject to the Romans, and the third from Severus himself. The first is extant, and contains the signatures of nine bishops; it complains of the violence of Smaragdus, and continues: "We learn that Pope Gregory has issued a summons for our Archbishop to appear at Rome. We have often warned him not to decide in our absence anything concerning the common cause of the Church, for our people are so excited over this affair that they would suffer death rather than be separated from the ancient Catholic communion. We are all then resolved, as we have written to our Archbishop, to be content with the judgement of God so long as we are under the yoke of barbarians, and to await a favourable time to throw ourselves at your feet, in order to decide this controversy after the example of your predecessors, the two Emperors Theodosius and Marcian. For we are ready to render you an account of our faith, but we cannot recognise as a judge him who is our adversary and whose communion we avoid (the Pope). If violence is employed to take our Archbishop to Rome, we could no longer hope for justice, and if any of us dies, our people will no longer permit a consecration by the Archbishop of Aquileia,

[1] Ep. i 16.

but will apply to the bishops of Gaul, who are our neighbours."

This letter pandered to the fondness of the Emperor for interposing in ecclesiastical affairs, and Maurice wrote to Gregory requesting him to let the matter rest until the country became more settled. Gregory complied with the wish of the Emperor, although contrary to his own feelings, for he wrote to John of Ravenna: "All that your Fraternity has written to me about the case of the bishops of Istria has been so deranged beforehand by the commands which I have received from the most pious Prince that in the meantime I have put off compelling them. I congratulate you very much on the zeal and earnestness in which you have written, and I acknowledge that I am many times your debtor. But understand that I shall not cease to write with the utmost zeal and freedom about the same question to the most Serene Lord."[1]

Gregory did not betray his annoyance to the schismatical bishops, nor relax his efforts to reclaim them, but took advantage of one of their letters to attract them by charity and persuasion: he writes to the bishops of Istria: "I received your letters with gratification, but my pleasure would have been greater if I had to rejoice over your return. In the first part of your letter you mention that you suffer persecution. Persecution unreasonably endured does not profit to salvation. It is not lawful to expect reward for a fault, for you ought to reflect upon what blessed Cyprian says: 'It is the cause makes the martyr, not the suffering.' If so, it is very incongruous in you to

[1] Ep. ii 46.

glory in persecution, through which it is not clear that you are led to eternal reward. Let, then, the integrity of faith lead your Charity back to your mother the Church that begat you, let no fixed determination sever you from unity of concord, let no persuasion weary you in seeking the right path. For in the synod that treated of the Three Chapters, it is openly apparent that there was no convulsion of faith nor any change, for, as you know, it only dealt with certain persons, one of whom, in his writings, evidently swerved from the rectitude of Catholic faith, and was not unjustly condemned.

"When you write that from that time Italy has been scourged more than other provinces, you ought not to twist that to its opprobrium, for it is written: *Whom the Lord loves he chastises: he scourges every son he receives.*[1] If what you say is true, it has been more loved by God, and in every way has met with his approbation, for it has deserved to receive the scourge of its Lord. Since, however, it is not as you try to assert, listen to the reason.

"After Vigilius the Pope, of happy memory, took up his abode in the royal city, he promulgated a sentence of condemnation against the Empress Theodora and the Acephali, and then the city of Rome was besieged and taken by the enemy. Had the Acephali a good cause, or were they unjustly condemned because this happened after their condemnation? No. Not one of you, nor anyone else who is instructed in the Catholic faith, will tell me this, or agree to concede it in any sense. Knowing this, come back from your former resolution. In

[1] Heb. xii 6.

order that conviction may banish from your mind any doubt about the Three Chapters, I have thought it useful to send you the book which my predecessor Pelagius, of holy memory, wrote on this question. If—setting aside all desire of wilful opposition—with a sincere and attentive heart you will frequently read it, I feel confident that, when you follow the reasoning throughout, you will be led to our unity. But if, after reading the book, you wish to persist in your present determination, you show that you do not yield to reason, but to obstinacy. Hence, in deep compassion, I admonish your Charity—since by God's help the integrity of our faith has remained inviolate in the case of the Three Chapters—to lay aside ferment of mind, and to return the more quickly to your mother the Church, who expects and invites her children, and who, as you know, is daily waiting for you."[1]

The question came up again two years later during the exile of Constantius, Bishop of Milan, in Genoa. He refused to hold communion with three of his suffragans, who upheld the Three Chapters, and who had obtained the ear of Theodolinda, the Catholic queen of the Lombards. She declined to communicate with Constantius, and Gregory wrote to her: "The report has reached us that your Glory has been led by some bishops into this scandal against holy Church, and that you have suspended communion with Catholic unity. Inasmuch as we love you sincerely, we grieve the more that you have listened to foolish and ignorant men, who not only do not know what they speak of, but are scarcely able

[1] Ep. ii 51.

to understand what they hear. They say that in the time of Justinian, of pious memory, some things were decreed contrary to the Council of Chalcedon; and as long as they neither read nor believe those who do read, they remain in their error, which they pretend is ours. For by the testimony of our conscience we certify that in the faith of the same holy Council of Chalcedon nothing was changed, nothing violated, but whatever was done in the times of the aforesaid Justinian, was so done that the faith of the Council of Chalcedon was in no way disturbed. If anyone presumes to say or understand anything against the faith of the same synod, we execrate his interpretation by the infliction of anathema. Since you are aware of our integrity by the witness of our conscience, do not ever separate yourself from the communion of the Catholic Church, lest your many tears and many good works perish if they are found to be alienated from the true faith. It is fitting that your Glory should send with all speed to our most reverend brother and fellow bishop Constantius, whose faith and conduct of old are well known to us, and to indicate to him by your own letters that you cheerfully accept his consecration, and that you are in no way separated from the communion of his church." [1]

Constantius apparently did not deliver this letter, for Gregory writes to him: "What you have written explaining why you did not send my letter to Queen Theodolinda, inasmuch as the fifth Synod is mentioned in it, if you think she would be scandalised by it, you have done rightly not to send it. We do now what will please you by only praising the four

[1] Ep. iv 4.

synods. In the synod held at Constantinople and called by many the fifth, I wish you to understand that nothing was enacted or decreed against the four holy synods, for it treated only of persons not of faith, and of those persons about whom nothing is contained in the Council of Chalcedon, but after the definite canons were decided, the controversy arose during which the action about certain persons was debated. However, we have done as you wished and made no mention of the same synod."[1] Gregory wrote another letter to Theodolinda, nearly identical with the above, but changing the portion complained of into the following: "For we venerate the four holy Synods: Nicea in which Arius, Constantinople in which Macedonius, the first of Ephesus in which Nestorius, Chalcedon in which Eutyches and Dioscorus were condemned, professing that anyone who thinks otherwise than do these four councils is alien from the faith of truth. We condemn those whom they condemn, absolve whom they absolve, subjecting him to anathema who presumes to add to or take from the faith of the same four councils, especially that of Chalcedon, about which have arisen doubts, and occasion taken by some ignorant men to add to or subtract from the faith."[2] The incident exemplifies Gregory's willingness to take advice, his delicacy in not giving unnecessary offence, and his not taking offence himself when his subordinate declined to deliver his first letter to the Queen. Theodolinda took the letter in good part, separated herself from the schismatical bishops, and became reconciled to Constantius and the unity of the Church.

[1] Ep. iv 39. [2] Ep. iv 38.

The same letter to Constantius furnishes another example of Gregory's tact in dealing with the schismatics: "From the tenor of the letter of your Holiness, we see that you are in great grief, chiefly on account of the bishops and citizens of Brescia, who order you to send them a letter in which you are to swear that you in no way condemn the Three Chapters. If Lawrence, the predecessor of your Fraternity, did not do it, it should not be asked of you. But if he did, he was not in agreement with the universal Church, and overstepped the oaths of his pledges. But since we believe that the same holy man kept the oaths and remained in the unity of the Church, there can be no doubt that he swore to none of his bishops that he in any way condemned the Three Chapters. From which your Holiness will gather that you ought not to be compelled to do that which was never done by your predecessor. But in order that those who have thus written to you may not be scandalised, send them a letter in which you profess, under infliction of anathema, that you neither take away anything from the Synod of Chalcedon nor receive those who take from it, and that you condemn whomever they condemn, absolve whom they absolve. Thus I think they will be most quickly satisfied." [1]

[1] Ep. iv 39.

CHAPTER VI

AMONGST THE CHURCHES OF ITALY

The synod brought Gregory into personal connection with the Italian bishops of his province. The distracted state of the country, the continual excesses of the Lombards, and the general entanglement of affairs produced corresponding disorders in ecclesiastical discipline. Deserted churches, vacant sees, parishes without priests, lax and incompetent bishops, simony and dissensions amongst the clergy were the natural consequences of war, uncertain communications, and absence of supervision. Too conscious himself of the responsibility of the episcopate, Gregory felt deeply the deterioration of the episcopal character. His friend, John of Ravenna, in sending congratulations on his accession, respectfully blamed him for his timidity and for his flight to escape the episcopal office. In order to defend himself, Gregory, in the beginning of 591, wrote a treatise on the pastoral charge, which served as a rule or guide to the bishops of the time, and has ever since been a standard work, ranking with that of St John Chrysostom on the priesthood. "In a humble spirit," he writes to John, "you have blamed me for wishing to escape from the burdens of the pastoral charge by hiding myself, and that this burden may not appear light to some I express in the words of this present book all that I think

of its weightiness, in order that he who has it not, may not incautiously seek it, and that he who has incautiously sought it, may tremble at having attained it."[1]

The treatise consists of four parts: the first brings before the mind of the aspirant to the episcopate the dispositions with which he should undertake the office, in order that he may examine whether he is fitted for it, whether he has learning, virtue, courage, firmness, love of work, and whether he is exempt from the imperfections figured by the corporal defects, which in the old law debarred a candidate from the priesthood. The second part supposes the pastor lawfully appointed, and explains his duties, his application to prayer, to instruction, to the assistance of his flock, his humility, his zeal, his discretion. The third develops in some detail the work of preaching, and describes the method of instruction suited to different persons according to age, sex, condition, occupation, inclinations, permanent or passing. The fourth briefly instils into the pastor the duty of frequently reflecting on his own conduct, in order to instruct himself and keep himself in humility.

The work had an immediate and powerful effect, and tended to establish firmly Gregory's reputation and influence. St Leander, to whom Gregory addressed it, circulated it in Spain, the Emperor Maurice ordered its translation into Greek, bishops from distant provinces applied for it. "We have directed," Gregory writes, "the book of pastoral rule to be sent by the bearer of this to the priest Colombo —in Africa—and do not detain it for yourself, for

[1] *Lib. Reg. Past., Introd.*

we shall quickly send another for your own use."[1] St Lucinianus, Bishop of Carthagina, thus writes to Gregory: "Your book is the palace of all virtues. There prudence fixes the limits of good and bad discretion; justice gives each one his own when it subjects the soul to God and the body to the soul. There fortitude is found ever unruffled in prosperity or adversity, and is neither crushed in calamity nor elevated in success. There temperance breaks the fury of lust, and discreetly assigns a bound to pleasure. There you include all that pertains to the participation of eternal life, and not only describe a rule of life for pastors, but provide a guide for the conduct of those who have not the duty of government."[2]

It became the spiritual book read by bishops and clergy; it was the first declaration by a Sovereign Pontiff of the ideal life of a bishop and of the end of the pastoral charge. What the rule of St Benedict did for the monks, this book did for the bishops; it provided a norm, a rule of life, a model, and, as the monk Gregory had ordered his life in accordance with the rule of the holy Patriarch, so the monk-Pope felt the need of a similar rule on which to model the life of a bishop. It has been translated into every language, and since Gregory's time has been in constant use. Alfred the Great translated it into Anglo-Saxon. Synods in Gaul ordered all bishops to study it. Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, in the ninth century, states that a copy of it, with a copy of the Canons, was given to each bishop at his consecration, with an order to conform his life to its precepts.

[1] Ep. v 38. [2] Ep. ii 54.

This book prepared the way for Gregory's action with the churches of Italy. It is difficult to picture the sad state of the country: although from the letters of Gregory much may be conjectured. He speaks of a timid clergy hurrying off with the sacred vessels in their hands to seek refuge in Sicily or some distant province, of bishops turning their palaces into fortified strongholds, of monks keeping watch as sentinels on the walls of a city, of hermits wandering about announcing danger or exhorting to peace. These instances let light into a multitude of evils in churches and monasteries: bishops terrified, inactive, or absent, clergy without supervision or deprived of support, and people without services or sacraments. Gregory's first care was to provide for the widowed or deserted sees. To many he appointed new pastors, some he removed to towns that were more secure from the Lombards, and others he united to a neighbouring see. His activity was such that during the first year of his pontificate, in spite of the difficulties and complications attending removal or erection of sees, he dealt with no fewer than fifteen deserted churches: Minturna, Aquino, and Volturno, in Campania; Canossa and Tauriana, in Apulia and Bruttium; Fondi, Cumae, and Formiae, in Campania; Terni, in Umbria; Castellamare and Capo di Pisciota, in Lucania; Belvedere and Meria, in Bruttium; and Cesterna and Correse.

His letters tell the sad story in each case. "After the impiety of the enemy has desolated the churches of various cities for their sins, so that no hope of restoring them remains to the deprived people, their priests being dead and no one to govern them, we

are the more bound with the imperative charge not to let the remainder of the people be caught in the snares of a cunning enemy through loss of the road of faith. Moved, therefore, by solicitude for this, we have determined to order them to be governed by neighbouring pontiffs." [1] "We have heard that the church of Canossa is so destitute of priests that penance cannot be administered to the dying nor baptism to infants. Moved by the burden of this charitable and necessary work, we order you, beloved brother, fortified by the authority of this precept, to go as visitor to the above church, and to ordain two parochial priests, who, however, are to your satisfaction worthy of the office by probity of life and gravity of manners, and against whom there is no canonical objection, so that the due precautions of holy Church may be observed." [2] He writes to the clergy, people, and government of Perugia: "We wonder, beloved brethren in Christ, how you can see the Church of God so long without a ruler, and think so little of the government of yourselves and the people. For it is evident that if the flock lack the care of a pastor, it wanders through pathless tracts, and is the more easily liable to fall into the snares of an enemy. Hence it is necessary in the fear of God to seek out from among those who serve the Church one who may worthily undertake the ministry of a pastor, and by the help of God be a dispenser of the divine sacraments, so that he may with a pure intention daily offer up the sacrifice for the children of your church, and show the flock the way that will lead them to the eternal country." [3]

[1] Ep. iii 20 [2] Ep. i 53. [3] Ep. i 60.

In providing bishops Gregory spared no pains or vigilance to secure worthy pastors. Unless compelled he did not himself interfere in the election. He writes to the clergy of Milan: "According to the purport of my old resolve never to interfere with the person who should undertake the burden of the pastoral charge, I shall follow your election with prayers that Almighty God, who always has foreknowledge of our future actions, may grant you a pastor in whose speech and conduct you may find pastures of divine exhortation, in whose mind humility may shine with uprightness and severity with gentleness, who shall be able to show you the way of life not only by word but by example."[1] At the same time he would not countenance unworthy men. "We learn from the letter of your Fraternity," he writes to Bishop Severus, whom he had appointed visitor to the Church of Rimini, "that some have agreed to the election of Ocleatinus, on whom, since we have not consented, the office cannot devolve. But ascertain from the inhabitants of the city if they can find anyone fit for the work, in whose election all may unite. Otherwise the bearer of this will indicate the person we have mentioned to him, in whose favour the decree of the election should be made. Be yourself active and solicitous in the visitation of the same church, so that its possessions may be preserved intact and its affairs be settled under your management in the usual way."[2] He was ever on the alert to obtain suitable men; in a letter to the Bishop of Syracuse he says: "Felix, a man of consular rank, the bearer of these presents, has told us that there is

[1] Ep. iii 29. [2] Ep. i 57.

in your neighbourhood a priest who, by his good life, seems worthy to be raised to the episcopate. Your Fraternity will call him before you, and I am sure, at the peril of your own soul, will diligently examine him. If you see that he is worthy to be promoted to the dignity, take care to send him to us, that by the help of God we may ordain him bishop for a place that we have provided."[1]

The Catholics in the provinces ruled by the Lombards suffered greater spiritual privations, and Gregory could only occasionally provide them with a bishop. In the principal cities the Arians set up a bishop of their own, seized the cathedral and the ecclesiastical revenues, the Catholic bishops being imprisoned, driven away, or impoverished. The same happened with the parochial clergy attached to the city churches, so that in the course of a few years the Catholics in the towns under Lombard rule were reduced to sad straits. Gregory, unable to deal with them directly, gradually established the authority of the Church, and provided pastors through the influence of Theodolinda, the Lombard queen. He assiduously cultivated her good will, and induced her to use her power in mitigating the evils of the Church in the Lombard cities. At times the intervention of hostile troops cut off communication between Rome and the imperial territory; for instance, the bishops in the neighbourhood of Ancona on the Adriatic could only hold intercourse with the Holy See by means of vessels sent round by Sicily, and on this account Gregory placed some of his bishops temporarily under the Bishop of Ravenna.

[1] Ep. ii. 24.

Gregory's letters provide so many instances of his dealing with individual churches and bishops that it is difficult to make a selection. John the Deacon calls him Argus-eyed; he seemed to know what was passing in every part of the country; by means of agents over the patrimony of the Church, by cross-questioning strangers and messengers, by the visits of bishops and priests to Rome, by constant receipt of letters, he became acquainted with all the tales of spiritual and temporal distress, and to know them was to strive to remedy them. In letter after letter are intermingled stern corrections for ecclesiastical faults, fatherly exhortations to a better life, intricate questions of business, quaint humour, constant charity, and sympathy for every kind of distress. Fallen priests are condemned to canonical penance, subdeacons for ever deprived of office and degraded to the rank of laymen, bishops even deprived of holy Communion for a time, fugitive priests sent back to their dioceses, bad customs and loose practices abolished, and all with an admirable mixture of firmness, tact, and charity, accompanied by a merciful tendency to forgive and forget, if the individual showed signs of penitence and amended his ways. There are frequent admonitions to bishops and legates to inquire into abuses and delinquencies, and to correct them by excommunication, degradation, or lesser penalties, with constant reference to the Canons and ecclesiastical discipline. On the other hand, bishops are reproved for excessive severity, giving way to passion, or yielding to self-interest, gain, or the persuasion of friends.

The following letter to Natalis, Bishop of Salona,

fairly represents Gregory's method with an offending bishop: "I have learnt, dearest brother, from many people who have come from your city that, neglecting the pastoral charge, you give yourself up to feasting. I should not believe this unless it were confirmed by a knowledge of your life. For you never spend any time in reading, are never active in exhortation, but, from the testimony of your subjects, you are even ignorant of the ecclesiastical order, and do not preserve your self-respect. When my predecessor, of happy memory, prohibited you from proceeding against Honoratus the Archdeacon, you retained in your heart the rancour of long ingratitude, and when the same course was expressly forbidden by me, neglecting the commands of God and despising our orders, you strove speciously to degrade the aforesaid Honoratus your archdeacon by seeming to promote him to a higher dignity. By this means you were able to substitute in his position of archdeacon one who would pander to your character, for I believe that the aforesaid man has displeased you by nothing else than by preventing you from giving the sacred vessels and vestments to your relatives. This cause I now wish, as my predecessor, of happy memory, did before, to investigate thoroughly; but you, conscious of your deeds, have delayed sending any duly instructed delegate for the inquiry. Let your Fraternity then come to a right frame of mind after so many admonitions of your fault, and restore the aforesaid Honoratus to his own position as soon as ever you shall receive this my letter. If you should make any delay, take notice that the use of the pallium, which is dependent on this see, shall be

taken from you. If after losing the pallium you persist in the same pertinacity, know that you will be deprived of participation in the body and blood of the Lord. After which it will be necessary for us, with more searching examination, to find out, with every care and inquiry, whether you ought to remain in the episcopate. We depose from the office of archdeacon him who, contrary to the dictates of justice, has consented to be promoted to the place of another. If after this he still presume any longer to minister in that office, let him know that he will be deprived of the participation of holy Communion. Do not, dearest brother, provoke us by any further deeds, lest you feel that very hard to bear in severity, which you contemn when now offered in charity. Having restored Honoratus the Archdeacon send us with all speed an instructed delegate, who may explain to me your reasons in what has to be done in these allegations. We have determined that the same archdeacon shall also come to us, that knowing the assertions of both parties, we may decree whatever shall be just and pleasing to God. We are in no way influenced by respect of persons, but by the assistance of God we shall uphold the standard of justice without any exception of persons." [1]

Natalis replies, defending himself on some points and promising to send delegates, and Gregory again writes to him: "In defence of your feasts your Fraternity mentions the banquet of Abraham, in which, according to the sacred Scripture, he is said to have entertained three angels. But in this instance we should not blame your Holiness for the

[1] Ep. ii 18.

feast, if we thought that you were accustomed to entertain angels. . . . In your letter your Holiness justly praises feasts given with the intention of charity, but it must be remembered that those truly proceed from charity when the character of the absent is not torn to pieces, when no one is held up to derision, when there are no idle stories about secular affairs, but the words of sacred reading are heard, when no more is taken than is necessary to refresh the body, or to keep it in health for the practice of virtue. If, indeed, you do this in your banquets, I acknowledge that you are the master of abstainers. . . . However, after your Fraternity has returned to your duty, I shall not remember the injury to myself or my predecessors. When you say that those things should be preserved in our time that have been delivered and kept by my predecessors, far be it from me to infringe on the statutes of our ancestors against my fellow priests in any church, for I should be doing an injury to myself if I disturbed the rights of my brethren."[1] Later he wrote to his friend John of Ravenna: "I was very grieved about our brother and fellow bishop Natalis, because I knew much pride in him, but since he has corrected his conduct, he has comforted my sorrow by conquering me."[2]

Two other interesting letters are written to the parties in a dispute, and show Gregory's tact in disposing both to agreement. He writes to Maximianus, Bishop of Syracuse: "I recollect that I have often admonished you not to be precipitate in passing sentence, and now I hear that, excited by passion, you have excommunicated the most reverend Abbot

[1] Ep. ii 52. [2] Ep. xi 52.

Eusebius. I am very much astonished that his venerable character, his great age, and his long sickness could not turn your mind from anger. Whatever fault he may have committed, the affliction of sickness should suffice for punishment. When the divine rod strikes, human scourges are superfluous. But perhaps you are permitted to fall into excess over such a person in order to make you more cautious in more trivial cases, so that you may ponder long before you pass sentence on anyone. The more you have exasperated this man by your passion, so now console him the more by gentleness, for it is very unjust that those who have loved you more, should feel that you act more fiercely against them." [1]

To Eusebius he writes: "In your charity believe that I am as truly grieved for your sorrow as if I myself had suffered an injury in your person. But after I learnt that when our most reverend brother and fellow bishop Maximianus offered goodwill and communion, you were unwilling to hold communion with him, I then understood that what had previously been done was just. Humility in a servant of God ought to be conspicuous in time of affliction. Those who stand up against their superiors show that they despise being servants of God. He ought by no means to have done what he did, but you ought to have borne it with all humility, and when he offered to be reconciled you should have met him with thankfulness. Because you have not done this, I know that you have caused us great sorrow. It is no great thing to be humble to those who honour us, for this all secular persons do, but we should

[1] Ep. ii 34.

especially be humble to those from whom we suffer anything, for the Psalmist says: *See my humiliation from my enemies.*[1] What kind of life do we lead who are unwilling to be humble to the fathers? Therefore I ask you to let all bitterness pass out of your heart, lest perchance the end be nigh, and the old enemy by the iniquity of discord stop the way to the heavenly kingdom."[2]

There are several letters about Januarius, Bishop of Cagliari, an old man whom Gregory pitied on account of his age, but to whom he was compelled to write sternly. He neglected his clergy, his ecclesiastical property, and his monasteries, he exacted excessive burial fees, and left his diocese in a general state of disorder and neglect. A dispute arose with a neighbouring farmer about a field, and one day Januarius before Mass took his peasants and reaped the good man's crop. He returned to celebrate Mass, and immediately after came out and ordered the landmarks to be removed. Gregory writes: "The Apostle Paul, the preacher of the Almighty Lord, says: *An ancient man rebuke not.*[3] This rule is to be followed when the fault of the senior does not lead the heart of juniors to perdition. But when the senior gives example to the young for their destruction, then he should be chastised with severe rebuke. For it is written: *They are all the snare of young men.*[4] And again, the Prophet says: *And the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed.*[5] So great iniquity has come to my ears about your old age, that unless we had taken a

[1] Ps ix 14. [2] Ep. ii 36. [3] 1 Tim. v 1.
[4] Isa. xlii 22. [5] Isa. lxv 20

merciful view of it, we should have punished it with public malediction. . . . Since we still spare your grey hairs, we exhort you, old man, to become reasonable in time, and to restrain the great levity of your conduct and the perversity of your deeds. The nearer you approach to death the more careful and timid you ought to become. Indeed, the sentence of punishment had already been hurled against you, but we knew your simplicity in your old age, and for the time we are silent. We have determined to excommunicate for two months those by whose counsel you have done this, in such a way, however, that if anything happens to them during those two months they shall not be deprived of the blessing of viaticum. But henceforth cautiously refrain yourself from their advice, and be careful, lest you become a disciple to them in evil, to whom you ought to be a master in good, and lest later we spare neither your simplicity nor your old age."[1]

An example of Gregory's method with personal faults occurs in a letter to John, Bishop of Ravenna, an intimate friend with whom he engaged in a controversy about the unlawful use of the pallium outside the prescribed times. In the following letter he taxes his friend with his personal faults, and without palliating their nature he tempers his monitions with gentleness and affection: "This first of all grieves me that your Fraternity writes to me with a double heart, declaring flattering things in your letters, and with your tongue speaking quite differently to seculars. Next, it is very painful to me that up to this day my brother John retains on his lips those

[1] Ep. ix 1.

quips that children of notaries are accustomed to use. He speaks stinging words, and seems to take pleasure in their smartness. He flatters friends who are present and abuses the absent. Thirdly, it is painful to me, and altogether execrable, that he imposes disgraceful tasks on his servants, so that they are openly called effeminate. Furthermore, that there is no discipline for regulating the conduct of his clerics, but that he shows himself only as a master to his clergy. And lastly—though first, indeed, by the gravity of its pride—there is his use of the pallium outside the church, which he never presumed to do in the time of my predecessors, and which was never presumed by his predecessors, as our legates testify; yet in my days he not only does it in contempt of me, but does it frequently.

"From all this I discover that the dignity of a bishop rests entirely in outward show, and not in the heart. I give thanks to Almighty God that at the time I heard this—for my predecessors never heard it—the Lombards were stationed between me and the city of Ravenna, for had it not been so I should perhaps have shown to men how severe I can be. Do not think that I wish in any way to burden or degrade your church. Remember where the deacon from Ravenna stood in the solemnities of the Roman Masses, and inquire where he now stands, and acknowledge that I wish to honour the church of Ravenna. But when anything is assumed through pride, that I cannot tolerate. But about this I have already written to our deacon at Constantinople to inquire from all who have thirty or forty bishops under them, and whatever the custom may be in walking with the

pallium in processions, far be it from me to seem to diminish in any way the honour due to the church of Ravenna.

"Think over what I have said above, dearest brother; hearken to the day of calling; consider the account you must give of the burden of the episcopate. Amend those manners of a notary. See that your words and deeds are worthy of a bishop. Be wholly sincere with your brethren: say not one thing and have another in your heart. Do not seek to seem better than you are, but rather be better than you seem. Believe me that when I was first raised to my position I was full of good opinion and of great affection for your Fraternity, and if you had wished to retain my affection, you would have found me still a brother, loving you sincerely, running to you with all eagerness; but knowing your conversation and your conduct I acknowledge that I held back. I beseech you by Almighty God to amend all the things that I have mentioned, especially the vice of duplicity. Permit me to love you; to be loved by brothers is useful for you in this life and the next. Answer this not by words but by your conduct."[1]

The variety of subjects on which Gregory wrote to the bishops testifies to his constant vigilance. Paschasius, Bishop of Naples, had neglected to distribute the customary alms to the clergy and poor. Four hundred gold pieces were due, and Gregory orders him without delay to distribute, in the presence of his agent Anthemius, one hundred gold pieces to the clergy serving the church, sixty-three to those who ministered in the time of his predecessor, fifty

[1] Ep. v 15.

to strange priests, one hundred and fifty to deserving poor, and thirty-six to beggars. Later he writes to Anthemius: "We wish that our aforesaid brother Paschasius should appoint a vice-dominus and major-domo, so that he may be in a position and prepared to receive guests who arrive, and that he may deal with causes that arise. If you see that he is negligent, or delays to fulfil what we order, assemble all his clergy, and let them choose by common council such persons as may be appointed for the offices that we indicate."[1]

The same Paschasius, perhaps from fear of hostile attacks, took a fancy for building ships, and to the surprise and disedification of the Neapolitans daily went down to the shore to superintend the building to the neglect of the episcopal duties. He had already spent upwards of four hundred gold pieces, and Gregory writes to Anthemius: "We have heard that our brother and fellow-bishop Paschasius is so slothful and negligent that he is not at all recognised as a bishop, so that neither his own church nor his monasteries, nor his flock, nor the oppressed poor feel any esteem for him, nor does he provide any protection for those who apply to him for justice. What is still more serious, he will take no advice from the counsel of the wise, or of those who urge him to do right, so that he does not learn from others what he cannot himself attend to, but neglecting what belongs to the pastoral charge, he spends all his time uselessly in building ships. In this he is said to have already wasted four hundred pounds or more. To increase his fault, he is said to go daily with discredit

[1] Ep. xi 71.

down to the sea with one or two clerics, and, as the story goes, he appears so vile and despicable to his own people and to strangers that he is thought to retain nothing of the episcopal character or reverence. This state of things, as you know, is not without blame to you, who have delayed to rebuke and compel him as was fitting. Since it not only brings condemnation on himself, but dishonour on the sacerdotal office, we wish you to call him to account before other priests and some of the principal persons of his flock as witnesses, and exhort him to shake off his torpor, and to be not slothful but vigilant in the care of his church and monasteries, to show fraternal charity towards his children, to be resolute with discretion in defence of the poor so far as justice allows, willingly to take counsel from the wise, so that the city may be assisted by his solicitude, and he may atone for the faults of his sloth. If, which we do not expect after this our admonition, he shall continue negligent in his customary way, send him at once to us, that he may learn how to behave as a priest in the fear of God."[1]

Besides the correction of episcopal faults, Gregory often wrote to the clergy and people of the see in support of the bishop. He addresses them with dignity, under a sense of the responsibility of his position, and displays a paternal regard and interest in their welfare. In requesting them to elect a bishop, he intimates the qualities that should direct their choice for the good of themselves and the Church: in appointing a visitor he orders them in clear and decisive terms to obey. To the people of Rimini he

[1] Ep. xiii 26.

writes: "If, dearly beloved, you really see your fault, you ought to cleanse yourselves by assiduous prayer to God, because you have not received your bishop with respect, nor as sons; the anxiety and trouble that you have caused has led to his incurring bodily sickness." [1]

For any special work, to remedy existing disorders, or on the death of a bishop, Gregory frequently nominated a bishop as visitor to a neighbouring church. A letter to the clergy and people announces his arrival and enjoins obedience. He prescribes duly the exact procedure and the extent of the power delegated, and occasionally reserves particular questions to himself. He writes to Leontius, whom he had appointed visitor at Rimini, "We understand from the complaints of the clergy of the church of Rimini, over which you are visitor, that your Fraternity has committed the management of its property and the transaction of its other business to your own men. If such is the case we do not think that the complaints of the clergy are uncalled for. We therefore admonish you to arrange that whatever belongs to the above-named church, shall be managed and transacted by its own men, whom you will appoint yourself, or through the deacon who delivers this, so that no one may have just cause for murmuring against you. But if there be any suspicion of unfaithfulness amongst them, appoint some of your own men to act with them, that they may become mutual custodians one of the other, giving you an account of all things.

"Whatever accrues from the revenues of the

[1] Ep. iii 25.

church should be divided into four parts, according to custom, one being given to the clergy and another to the poor. The other two parts we wish to be divided into three, one of which can be spent on the repair of buildings, another paid to Castorius the bishop for his sustentation, and the third retained by yourself. If any of the clergy of the above-named church are fit for priesthood, diaconate, or other order, you have free permission by our authority to ordain them. Be watchful in gaining souls; be solicitous over the good life of the clergy. Do not allow the property of the church in which you are making the visitation to perish or deteriorate through any pilfering, lest, which God forbid, you incur the guilt of eternal peril before God, and the responsibility of your neglect before us.

"We hear, moreover, that you take something from the public taxes, thereby incurring discredit, and also that in the causes of the church and defence of the poor, you are not as active as you ought to be. You should therefore abstain from what brings discredit, and be content with the stipends you receive from the church. If you do otherwise after this admonition, we shall hold a different opinion of you; for while you instruct those committed to you to struggle against avarice, your example teaches them not to be content with a sufficient stipend." [1]

Gregory made great use of the agents or managers of the patrimony of the Holy See in various provinces to assist him in the preservation of ecclesiastical discipline. He constantly committed cases to them for inquiry, and even for judgement. Through them he

[1] Ep. v 44.

conveyed his commands to the bishops, sometimes commissioning them to administer rebukes, and entrusting them with the cases of delinquent bishops. Wishing to put a check to an annual gathering of the bishops, which was an occasion for conviviality, he writes to Peter, his agent in Sicily: "It is the custom for the bishops to meet on the feast day of the Pontiff. Stop them from meeting on the anniversary of my consecration, for such foolish and useless superfluity does not please me. If a meeting is necessary let them assemble on the festival of SS Peter and Paul, that they may return thanks to him by whose favour they are pastors." [1]

Anxious among other things to secure the residence of bishops in their sees, he thus writes to Anthemius, his agent in Campania: "We have heard that Picenius, the Bishop of Amalfi, is not content to reside in his church, but wanders abroad through divers places, and that others seeing this do not remain at home, but, following his example, prefer to live abroad. In this they rather invite the enemy to make depredations at home: we therefore order you by our authority persistently to forbid, under threats, the above-named bishop to continue his custom for the future, but let him reside in his church in a priestly manner. If you learn that he does not amend after your threats, send him to a monastery, taking care to acquaint us as soon as possible, so that you may ascertain our further orders in the matter." [2] On the same subject he writes to all the bishops of Sardinia: "We exhort you to follow the ancient custom of your churches in

[1] Ep. i 36. [2] Ep. vi 23.

announcing the time of Easter, and in seeking permission from your Metropolitan according to fixed rule, when necessity shall compel any of you to leave your diocese for any cause, and do not presume to pass him over in any way, except in the case, which we do not expect, that you should have a cause against your Metropolitan for the judgement of the Apostolic See, when you have permission, which you know is allowed by the canons of the ancient fathers." [1]

These samples from his letters, the multiplication of which would become tedious, convey an idea of the activity of Gregory in correcting ecclesiastical abuses in his own particular province. Of the extant letters five hundred and forty-three were written to persons resident in Italy, and Ewald mentions that only a small part of his correspondence has come down to posterity. There is little doubt that they were all the work of Gregory's own mind, and written or dictated by himself. They all bear the stamp of his style and character. In those days no committees or congregations eased the labour by preparing the case for the Pope's signature only, but Gregory gave his personal consideration and judgement to each matter as it occurred. Considering the caution and grasp of the subject displayed in the contents, the letters themselves are clearly the result of much time and pains devoted to each case. He grudged no labour, he spared no care to ascertain the truth. He investigated all cases indiscriminately; whether the breach of discipline arose in the highest ecclesiastical dignitary or the lowest priest or monk, it met with

[1] Ep. ix 8.

the same patient attention, diligent sifting, and impartial judgement. His energy was directed, not so much to punishing evil deeds as to correcting evil-doers, not so much to avenging past disorder as to preventing future disaster; the amendment of the delinquent or the abolition of the bad custom at once stayed his action. He brought to each case a thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical law, as well as a mastery of civil law, a matured judgement, an increasing experience, a keen insight into human nature, and an overflowing charity. Thus his pastoral decisions comprise an epitome of ecclesiastical jurisprudence and a school of spiritual government. In the crowd of anxieties and troubles that harassed his mind, few will refuse to sympathise with him in his yearning for his beloved retirement, for his sweetness of contemplation, for the tranquillity of his monastic cell. "I groan under the pressure of daily occupations, and I can scarcely breathe, but you who are still free fly from the occupations of the world, for as much as anyone succeeds in it, so much the more, I clearly see, does he decrease in the love of God." [1]

[1] Ep. v 16.

CHAPTER VII

THE LOMBARDS

While the care of all the churches pressed upon Gregory, the unfortunate political state of Italy increased the burden. In the midst of his efforts to restore discipline and activity in every diocese of the country, he was compelled to direct his energies to meet the incursions of the Lombards. Italy obtained little protection from its natural guardians; the Emperor was apathetic, the Exarch was inactive, and Gregory could not see his flock harassed, his country devastated, his churches destroyed, his children slaughtered, and his own city constantly threatened, without raising a warning voice and stretching out a helping hand. The Byzantine Court would neither acknowledge its losses in the province, nor recognise the increasing power of the Lombards: it supplied insufficient soldiers, without pay and without generals, and the absence of success and money crushed their spirits and made them discontented, reluctant to suffer hardship, and ready for treason or plunder. The Exarch at Ravenna would not listen to overtures for peace, his interest and his ambition prompted him to continue the war, which he had not the means or the capacity to prosecute with vigour. The enervated East could not withstand the young, hardy races of the West.

The Lombards, victorious over the three invasions

of the Franks, had settled down in their possessions under King Autharis. Restless and fond of strife, they could not keep within their confines, and their dukes or chiefs led out small bands in different parts of the country to pillage a neighbouring city, or devastate the lands in harassing, petty warfare. Partly Arian, partly Pagan, they respected neither church nor monastery, and their incursions brought spiritual distress with temporal ruin. At Easter, 590, King Autharis forbad the children of Lombards to be baptised in the Catholic churches or Catholic faith, "for which crime," Gregory writes to the bishops of Italy, "the divine Majesty extinguished him, so that he did not see another paschal solemnity."[1] Autharis died on September 5, 590, two days after the accession of Gregory. He had married Theodolinda, a daughter of the Catholic Duke of Bavaria, whom he courted in disguise and brought home to share his throne. At the death of the King the Lombard chiefs assembled at Pavia, and testified their respect for the character and prudence of Theodolinda by unanimously agreeing to elect to the vacant throne any one of the dukes whom she might select as her husband. She offered her hand and the crown to Agilulph, Duke of Turin, an experienced and valiant leader, who at Milan placed on his head the celebrated Gothic crown with its circlet of iron inlaid in the gold. The noble character of the Catholic Theodolinda, and his acceptance of the Lombard kingdom from her hand, inclined Agilulph to receive Catholics with favour. Although elected king, his control over the turbulent dukes was somewhat limited, for they

[1] Ep. i 17.

waged war and plundered at their own discretion more or less independently of the King. The Dukes of Spoleto and Beneventum were particularly restless and aggressive, and kept Rome in a state of alarm during the first years of Gregory's reign.

The position of affairs in September, 591, threatened disaster at any moment. King Agilulph remained in his capital at Pavia. Duke Ariulph of Spoleto, with a considerable force above Perugia, held the road between Rome and Ravenna, intercepted the communications, and made frequent raids in the neighbourhood. He had secret correspondence with Saona, an imperial city, and was endeavouring to entice two minor dukes from their allegiance to the Emperor. In the South, Arogi, Duke of Beneventum, committed depredations on his own borders, and commenced a movement of his troops towards Naples with the object of capturing the city. Rome was in a very inefficient state of defence: the old fortifications, restored by Belisarius forty years previously, had been neglected, the supply of provisions was precarious, the garrison consisted of a few imperial troops with a number of citizen militia trained for the defence of their homes and possessions, under the command of Castorius, a general of some capacity. The Exarch at Ravenna would not supply assistance, and repeated applications to the Emperor met with no response.

With no prospect of external aid, and aware of the danger of leaving the aggressive dukes without opposition, Gregory assumed almost the position of commander-in-chief. He trained and prepared a troop of soldiers as a reinforcement for Velox, a

general who was watching Ariulph, and thus writes to him: "We first announce to your Glory that the soldiers are ready for departure, but since your letter signified that the enemy was assembled and was marching in this direction, we have detained them here. But now it seems desirable that the soldiers should at once be sent to you, and your Glory will endeavour to admonish and exhort them to be prepared for work. When opportunity offers take counsel with our glorious sons Maurilius and Vitalian, and by the help of God do whatever they shall determine for the welfare of the State. And when you shall learn that Ariulph commences to march this way, or towards Ravenna, operate on his rear as becomes brave soldiers, so that your reputation by the help of God may, by the quality of your labour, be the more beneficial to the Republic."[1] He also writes to Maurilius and Vitalian: "We give thanks to God for the letter of your Glory because we learn of your safety, and are very much rejoiced at your solicitude, and the more so because what you write about is ready. But Aldio wrote to us after the receipt of your letter saying that Ariulph was close by, and we feared that the soldiers we sent you might fall into his hands. But here, as far as God will allow him, the glorious general is ready to meet him. Should the enemy march in your direction, your Glory will, with your customary skill, operate on his rear. For we trust in the power of Almighty God and of blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, that he who desires to shed blood on his festival may find him on the adverse side."[2]

[1] Ep. ii 3. [2] Ep. ii 29.

In another letter Gregory orders them to act in concert, and tells them that he has received a letter from Ariulph, which he forwards, and from which he doubts the loyalty of the people of Saona. He bids them to secure hostages from the town and examine them, if necessary under oath, and if they discover that hostages have also been sent to Ariulph, they must act cautiously and do the best for the State, taking care to incur no dishonour. "Moreover, glorious sons, be watchful, for, as I learn, the enemy is gathered together and is said to be at Narnia; if he should, by the wrath of God, direct his course here, do you, as far as you can, ravage his country, and keep a strict watch over the sentinels that you station, lest evil tidings reach us."[1] Ariulph, however, refrained from devastating the country around Rome, and seems to have hesitated to attack the city itself, although the anticipation of the assault brought an illness on Gregory. He despatched ambassadors to Ariulph to negotiate a truce, but the conditions proposed were not accepted by the Exarch. Gregory requested John of Ravenna to use his influence with Romanus, especially as the imperial troops in Rome were discontented, and would scarcely man the walls. Since nothing could induce the Exarch to come to terms, Gregory himself made a truce with Ariulph for the territory of Tuscany, paying the amount required by the duke out of the revenues of the patrimony of St Peter.

During these proceedings in Tuscany Gregory was equally active in the south against Arogi, Duke of Beneventum. The absence of capable officers was a

[1] Ep. ii 30.

great source of weakness to the imperial army; even in the important city of Naples the garrison had neither tribune nor captain. Gregory sent Leontius to take charge of the city of Nepi, and wrote to the citizens commanding obedience to him. To Naples he despatched the tribune Constantius, with orders to collect all the soldiers he could find in the Neapolitan territory, and fortified him with a general proclamation: "Gregory to all the Neapolitan soldiers. Among the noble qualities of warfare the highest praise is given to obedience to the requirements of the State, and submission to what is ordered on its behalf. Already we know how much your devotedness has achieved in submitting to our appointment of the magnificent tribune Constantius to preside over the defence of the city, and in manifesting to him fitting obedience and military discipline. Hence by these presents we have taken care to admonish you to show obedience to the aforesaid tribune, as you have hitherto done in all things concerning the welfare of our most Serene Lords and the protection of your city, so that whatever heretofore you have done well, you may increase by vigilance and care in the present emergency." [1] Duke Arogi stopped before he reached Naples, and contented himself with devastating Campania. The Lombards, apparently reluctant or unable to undertake long sieges, relied more on sudden assault, and their want of ships and sailors increased the security of the cities on the coast. Gregory opened negotiations with Arogi, and not only propitiated him but made him even friendly.

As soon as by Gregory's exertions Ariulph and

[1] Ep. ii 31.

Arogi had been diverted from the siege of Rome and Naples, and a peaceful understanding had been obtained, the Exarch Romanus issued from Ravenna with a small army and marched to Rome. Uneasy at the withdrawal of the direction of affairs from his hands, and jealous of the influence of Gregory, he desired to make a demonstration to support his own authority and undermine that of the Pontiff. He exacted anew the fealty of the Romans, took away with him almost all the imperial troops that composed the garrison of Rome, and to assert his military reputation he made a detour on his way back to Ravenna, and took Orti, Lodi, Bomanzo, Amelia, and Narni, and by aid of treason gained possession of Perugia. These exploits, undertaken in spite of the conciliatory negotiations, embittered the minds of the Lombards, and with a determination to avenge their losses King Ariulph himself took the field and prepared to march on Rome. Thus the visit of the Exarch renewed the conflagration and nullified all Gregory's efforts. He weakened Rome by withdrawing the troops, excited the hostile feelings of the Lombards, and when the storm burst he retired to the security of Ravenna, leaving Gregory to face the difficulty.

Agilulph collected his forces, summoned those of the dukes to join his standard, re-took Perugia, and appeared before Rome in 593. Since the first coming of the Lombards the Eternal City had always been in danger; bands of marauders and hostile armies had passed and re-passed it, the neighbourhood had been devastated, and supplies of provisions intercepted; but an invisible power seemed to protect the

city. The approach of the King with his whole force, and the knowledge that he was resolved to take ample revenge, spread terror into the hearts of the citizens; while messengers continually announced the coming of the foe, and brought tidings of slaughter and ruin; while the din of arms could be heard from the walls, and the hostile bands were closing round the city, Gregory was delivering to the people a homily on Ezechiel, and, with deep emotion, he interrupted his discourse: "No one will reproach me if after this my lips are silent, for you all see that our tribulations have grown exceedingly. On all sides we are hemmed in by swords, on all sides we tremble at the danger of death at our doors. Some come back to us wounded, others we hear are captured, others killed. I am forced to cease from continuing my exposition, *for my soul is weary of my life.*[1] No one will ask me for the explanation of the divine Word, *for my harp is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of those that weep.*[2] Already the eye of the heart is inattentive to the discussion of mysteries, *for my soul hath slumbered through heaviness.*[3] No longer is reading sweet to the soul, *because I forget to eat my bread through the voice of my groaning.*[4] How can he speak of the mystic sense of holy Scripture, whose life is in danger? How can I provide sweet things, who am daily compelled to drink bitter waters? What, therefore, remains but to return thanks with tears under the scourges that we suffer from our enemy? For he who created us became also our Father by the spirit of adoption which

[1] Job x 1.
[2] Job xxx 31.
[3] Ps. cxviii 28.
[4] Ps. ci 5.

he gave. Sometimes he feeds his children with bread, sometimes he corrects them with the rod, for by pains and rewards he prepares us for an eternal inheritance."[1]

These words, counselling resignation and prayer, were no sign of despondency, for Gregory at once took active measures against the enemy: they represent one side of his twofold character, a man of prayer and a man of action. The emptiness of the magazines, the weakness of the garrison, the devastation of the neighbourhood, the prospect of assault, did not extinguish his courage. He personally superintended and directed the means of defence; he consulted with Castorius the general and Gregory the Praetor, and with them made the best arrangement he could for the regulation of the provisions and the disposition of troops. Urged maybe by an inward conviction of the result, he determined to follow the example of St Leo with Attila, and to seek an interview with Agilulph. The meeting was arranged on the steps leading to the basilica of St Peter, which was then outside the fortifications. The importance of the issue infused fire into the natural vigour and eloquence of the Pontiff as he greeted the Lombard king under the shadow of the temple of the Prince of the Apostles. He entreated, he commanded, he threatened, and the eloquence of his words, the majesty of his presence, and the utter disregard of self made a deeper impression upon Agilulph than any parade of military hosts. The King relinquished his revenge, his prospects of plunder, his careful preparations, consented

[1] 2 Hom. Ezech. x 24.

to withdraw his troops and to enter into negotiations for a truce with the Romans.

Agilulph returned to Pavia, where his presence was needed to quell the inquietude of some chiefs who had taken advantage of his absence. A truce was concluded by the yearly payment of five hundred gold pieces by the Romans, and the effect of Gregory's influence on the Lombard king was lasting, for he continued to show goodwill towards Gregory and the Church, which would probably have been more marked but for the adverse influence of the schismatics. Gregory, in a letter to the Empress Constantina, complains of the tax which these tributes imposed on the Roman Church: "We have now lived for twenty-seven years in this city amid the swords of the Lombards, during which time we cannot calculate how much has been spent in order to live in peace among them. I will just mention that as, in the imperial dominions about Ravenna, the Emperor has a treasurer with the chief army of Italy who pays all the current expenses, so in this city for similar expenses I have been his treasurer. And although at the same time this Church spends so large a sum over clergy, monasteries, poor, the people, and the Lombards in addition, it is, nevertheless, oppressed with the troubles of all the churches, which together suffer under the pride of one man, though they do not presume to say anything about it." [1]

Gregory made strenuous attempts with the authorities at Constantinople to conclude a secure and permanent peace with the Lombards. In this

[1] Ep. v 21.

he employed the mediation of Queen Theodolinda and Constantius, Bishop of Milan, to prevail over Agilulph, while to gain over the Exarch Romanus he wrote to John, Bishop of Ravenna, and Severus the Scholastic. He advocated a peace not merely between the Lombards and Rome, but one to extend throughout Italy, to secure freedom from perpetual disturbance and to allow Church and people to attain some measure of prosperity. Jealousy and self-interest again counteracted these efforts for peace. Unfavourable reports against Gregory were spread at Constantinople, and certain officials at court were enlisted to minimise his influence. The Exarch persistently opposed him, and misrepresented his dealings with the Lombards; sometimes promising great military successes and sometimes employing unworthy stratagems to attain his personal ends. The patient Pope writes to Sabinianus of Sirmium: "What we suffer, most holy brother, in this land from the person of your friend, the Lord Romanus, we cannot possibly recount. But this much I will say, that his malice against us surpasses the swords of the Lombards, so that the enemies who kill us appear more gentle than the judges of the Republic, who, in their malice, destroy us by plunder and falsehood. Your Fraternity will pity me the more sincerely in what I suffer, as you reflect on the labour and sorrow I undergo in, at the same time, superintending bishops and clergy, monasteries and people, in carefully watching the wiles of the enemy, and in being ever on my guard against the falsehood and malice of the dukes."[1] In defending himself against

[1] Ep. v 42.

the false accusation of procuring the death of Bishop Malchus, Gregory thus shows his delicacy of conscience in his dealings with the Lombards: "About this matter briefly suggest to our most Serene Lord that if I, his servant, had wished to mix myself up in the death of the Lombards, to-day the Lombard people would have neither king, nor duke, nor count, and would be split up in the utmost confusion. But because I fear God, I tremble at being mixed up in the death of any man." [1]

This uprightness in treating with the Lombards was alien to the insidious policy of the imperial officials. Although the Emperor felt the power and influence of Gregory, the insinuations and misrepresentation of the Exarch restrained him from entering into the question of peace, and kept him in a state of irritation against the Pontiff. Gregory wrote to Maurice to inform him that Duke Ariulph was favourably disposed, and that he might be induced to come over to the imperial side. This letter seemingly exasperated the Emperor, who felt considerable annoyance on account of other pending disputes. At the suggestion of the party of the Exarch he sent Gregory a letter of unmeasured reproof. He reproached him with childishness and falsehood, declared his reports about Ariulph to be vain phantasms, bade him, instead of picking up idle stories, to attend to the city of Rome, left through his negligence without provisions during the late siege, and warned him to think of his duties to the State and of the future judgement of God.

Under these taunts and distortions Gregory could

[1] Ep. iv 47.

not remain silent, for they reflected on the honour of the priesthood and the dignity of the sacred office, and he replied to Maurice with freedom and force, though with the respect due to the Emperor: "While the piety of my Lords in their most serene letter strives to refute me in some things, in sparing me it has, indeed, not spared me at all, for under the polite term of simplicity it calls me a fool. . . . I say, therefore, that I, who, according to the most serene letters of my lords, am deceived by the cunning Ariulph, am undoubtedly called a fool, and such, indeed, I acknowledge myself. For if your Clemency says it not, the facts proclaim it. For if I had not been a fool, I should not have taken upon myself what I here suffer amid the swords of the Lombards. In ascribing to Ariulph that he was prepared heartily to go over to the Republic, since I am not believed, I am also branded as a liar. Even if I were not a priest, I know that it is a grave injury to a priest that, while keeping to the truth, he is thought to be false. Lately I learned that Nordulph obtained more credit than I did, and that Leo was believed in preference to me, and now credence is given to those around you rather than to my assertions.

"If, indeed, the captivity of my native land did not extend daily, gladly would I be silent under contempt and derision. But it distresses me greatly that for this crime of falsehood under which I suffer, captive Italy is daily brought under the yoke of the Lombards, and while no credence is given to my suggestions, the power of the enemy increases immensely. This will I suggest to my most Clement Lord; let him think all evil whatsoever of me, but for

the safety of the Republic and the occupation of Italy, let him not lend his ear easily to anyone, but believe facts rather than words. . . . Therefore to your Clemency I plead, not for myself, but for all priests, for I am a sinful man. And because I daily sin unceasingly before Almighty God, I trust for some expiation at his terrible scrutiny, if daily I suffer incessant wounds. And I believe that you will the more readily appease the same Almighty Lord, the more severely you afflict me who serve him so badly. Many wounds have I received, and thus in your commands I have found consolation that I did not hope for. If I am able I will briefly recount some of these wounds.

"First that a peace was concluded by me with the Lombards in Tuscany, which I made without any expense to the Republic. Then when the peace was broken, soldiers were taken away from the city of Rome, some to be killed by the enemy, others to be stationed at Narnia and Perugia, so that to preserve Perugia Rome was abandoned. After this a greater wound was the coming of Agilulph, so that with my own eyes I saw Romans bound with cords round their necks like dogs and led into France to be sold. And because we who were within the city have escaped his hands by the protection of God, why, I ask, should we be censured for deficiency of corn, which cannot be kept for long in the city, as I have elsewhere fully explained? For myself, indeed, I am in no way disturbed, for my conscience testifies that I am prepared to suffer any adversity, provided I escape all this with at least the safety of my soul. But I am grieved not a little for those glorious men Gregory

the Praetor and Castorius the general, who did their utmost and neglected nothing, but undertook excessive labours in watches and in the custody of the city during the same siege, yet after all this have been chastised with your great wrath. I clearly understand this, that it was not their acts that injured them, but my own self, with whom they shared the labour during the trouble, and with whom now they share the trouble after the labour.

"What the piety of my Lord fears for me, and threatens me with in the terrible judgement of Almighty God, I ask you by the same Almighty God to do this no longer, for we know not how we shall stand there. Paul, the great preacher, says: *Judge not therefore before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.*[1] This I will briefly say, that, unworthy and a sinner as I am, I trust more to the mercy of Jesus when he comes than to the justice of your Clemency. Men are ignorant of many things in his judgement, and it may be that what you praise he will blame, and what you blame he will praise. In all this uncertainty I return to my tears alone, begging the same Almighty God to direct our most Clement Lord here by his hand, and to find him free from all fault at that terrible judgement. And may he make me, if necessary, so to please men that I may not lose his eternal favour."[2]

No record exists of any answer to this letter, but Maurice apparently regretted his hasty language, for he afterwards inclined more towards peace.

[1] 1 Cor. iv 5. [2] Ep. v 40.

Although little hope of peace remained while the Exarch Romanus controlled affairs, Gregory still engaged actively in negotiations. At Pavia he employed Secundus, who had access to Agilulph, and at Ravenna he made use of Castorius his legate. He writes to Secundus: "After his return Castorius told us everything that had taken place between you and King Agilulph, and lest anyone should suspect us of delay, we have ordered him to go back to you with all speed. Learning, therefore, from him what should be done, be on the alert and urge by every means that this peace be concluded, for it is said that some are trying to prevent it. On this account hasten to act strenuously so that your efforts may not be fruitless, for this neighbourhood and some of the islands are now in grave danger."[1] In the midst of these attempts a libellous placard, attacking the legate Castorius and reflecting on Gregory himself, was posted one night in the streets of Ravenna. The Pontiff took the matter up with spirit and issued a manifesto to "Marinianus, Bishop of Ravenna, together with other brethren and fellow bishops, priests, levites, clergy, nobles, people, and soldiers, who live in the city of Ravenna, or who, belonging to it, live elsewhere," in which he excommunicated all concerned in posting the placard.[2]

The Lombards, encouraged by the indolence of the Exarch, continued their depredations in various parts of the country, and reports were frequently received of bloodshed and devastation. Arogi surprised Capua, and hostile bands took and destroyed Meria, Locri, and Crotona. Realising their want of ships

[1] Ep. vi 30. [2] Ep. vi 31.

and sailors they endeavoured to supply the deficiency, for Gregory in 596 writes to Gennadius, Governor of Africa,[1] expressing his anxiety about Corsica and begging him to send the tribune Anastasius, a competent commander, to arrange for its defence. The Lombards did make a descent upon Sardinia, for Gregory writes to Januarius of Cagliari: "We heard what our enemies had done in Sardinia before your Fraternity's letter reached us. Since we feared this beforehand, we lament with you now that it has taken place. If when we wrote to you and to our most excellent son Gennadius, warning you that this would happen, due care had been taken, the enemy either would not have approached or would have incurred danger in coming. Now, therefore, let what has happened sharpen your vigilance for the future, and by the help of God we shall leave nothing undone that may be of service.

"You know that the abbot, whom we sent to Agilulph some time back, has, by the help of God, arranged a peace with him, as his Excellency the Exarch writes to us. Until, however, the document confirming the peace is made out, keep watch upon the walls and take every precaution at all points, lest our enemies during the delay may again appear in your neighbourhood. We trust in the power of our Redeemer that the incursions and snares of our enemy may no longer injure you."[2] Later he writes: "Since we are no less solicitous for you than for ourselves, we think it well to mention that through certain inducements Agilulph, King of the Lombards, has not yet made peace. Hence your

[1] Ep. vii 3. [2] Ep. ix 4.

Fraternity must, while you can, provide more efficiently for the defence of the city and other places, and strive to procure abundance of provisions, so that when the enemy, with God's anger against him, shall come, he may not be able to destroy you, but may retire in confusion."[1]

Romanus, the Exarch, was at length superseded by Callinicus, and Gregory's hopes for peace at once revived. He immediately sent Probus, Abbot of St Andrew's, alluded to in the above letter, as Ambassador to Agilulph and the Court at Ravenna. He fixed upon a monk to ensure fidelity and probity, and joined with him the curator Theodore in Ravenna, and the erogator Domnellus, to supply experience and diplomacy. The attacks of the Avari on the northern confines of the Empire disposed the imperial officials more readily for peace. In 599 a truce for two years was concluded, and Italy enjoyed a taste of tranquillity for the first time for a long period. The messengers of Agilulph urged that Gregory's signature should be attached to the treaty, for the Lombards would not trust Greek promises; but he declined to sign it himself, alleging that he was only an intercessor and mediator between the King and the Exarch. The document would not be sufficiently protected against the evasions of both Greeks and Lombards, and Gregory thought that bad faith in construction of the terms would reflect on the integrity of the Holy See: but he was willing that it should be signed by a bishop or archdeacon.

Anxious to secure the observance of the truce, he wrote to the King asking him to use his power to

[1] Ep. ix 6.

restrain roving bands, and to the Queen to exercise her influence over her husband. To Agilulph he says, "That we may feel this peace to be a benefit to us as intended by you, greeting you with paternal charity, we ask that, as often as opportunity serves, you will by letter order your leaders, and chiefly those in this neighbourhood, to keep the peace strictly as was promised, and not to seek occasions for quarrels and unpleasantness."[1] To Theodolinda, "We learn from our son Probus the Abbot that your Excellence has been most earnest and gracious, as is your custom, in securing peace. Nor could we think otherwise of your Christianity than that you should make your labours and goodness prominent in the cause of peace. Hence we give thanks to the Almighty God that he so directs you by his goodness; that, as he has given you the true faith, so he grants that you should always work so as to please him. For, most excellent daughter, you have merited no small reward by saving the blood that might have been shed on both sides. In returning thanks to you, therefore, we pray the mercy of our God to reward you in goods of body and soul, both here and hereafter. Greeting you, moreover, with paternal affection, we exhort you so to influence your most excellent husband that he may keep on good terms with the Christian Republic. For, as we imagine you already know, it is useful in many ways to secure his friendship. Do you in your own way always encourage whatever tends to the goodwill and conciliation of both parties, and work for what the cause of mercy suggests, that you

[1] Ep. ix 42.

may better commend your good works in the sight of Almighty God."[1]

The peace lasted during the two years of the truce, but towards the end of the term signs of restlessness appeared amongst the Lombards. Agilulph made a lasting peace with the Franks and with the Huns, and entered into alliance with them. In 601 the war broke out again. Callinicus, fearing that the Lombard forces would overrun the imperial territory, collected an army, took the city of Parma, captured Godescalcus and his wife, the daughter of Agilulph, and carried them prisoners to Ravenna. On the part of the Lombards Agilulph took and destroyed Padua, the Avari invaded Istria, in central Italy Ariulph captured Camerino and gained a victory over the imperial troops, while Arogi led his forces against Sicily. In this renewal of hostilities Gregory recommenced his efforts to mitigate the horrors of war; he sent a circular letter to the bishops of Sicily, and to avert the divine anger, ordered processions every Wednesday and Friday as long as the island was threatened.[2] The duke relinquished the invasion of Sicily, probably at the solicitation of Gregory, for shortly afterwards the Pope writes a friendly letter to him asking his assistance in procuring timber for the church of St Peter. "Because we trust in your Glory as if you were really our son, we are urged to ask you with confidence for something, believing that you will not allow us to be inconvenienced since you can help us in this matter."[3]

In 603 the new Emperor, Phocas, recalled

[1] Ep. ix 43. [2] Ep. xi 51. [3] Ep. xii 21.

Callinicus, appointing Smaragdus in his place, and the first act of the new Exarch procured from Agilulph a truce of thirty days. Gregory wrote to Phocas begging his good will and assistance in the disturbed state of the country. He sent a legate to obtain help for Pisa, which city was reduced to sore straits. Agilulph demolished the walls of Crotona, took Milan by assault, and captured the castle of Volturino. Peace was again concluded in 605, and frequently renewed after Gregory's death. Not long before his end, Gregory wrote to Theodolinda from his sick bed: "Moreover, sending greetings with paternal affection, we ask you to return thanks for us to our most excellent son, the king, your husband, for the peace that he has made, and for the future urge him, as you have been accustomed, in every way to peace, that you may find in the sight of God, amongst your many good works, the gratitude of an innocent people who would have perished."[1] Not only the peace, but the conversion of the Lombards solaced him in his last illness.

Theodolinda, the Catholic Queen of the Lombards, was a main instrument in the conversion of her people, but to Gregory is due the credit of encouraging and directing her influence. He wrote frequently to her, sent messengers and legates to her, communicated with her through the bishops, composed for her his celebrated *Dialogues*; and it must have been gratifying to his paternal heart at the end of his days to learn that Agilulph had consented that his son should be baptised in the Catholic Church. "The letter you

[1] Ep. xiv 12.

have sent us from Genoa," he writes, "has made us partakers of your joy, from which we learn not only that you have a son given to you, but, what is most praiseworthy in your Excellence, that he is associated to us in the Catholic faith. Nor could we think otherwise of your Christianity than that you should strive to protect, by the help of virtue, what you have received by the divine gift, so that our Redeemer may recognise you as his familiar servant, and may happily train in his fear a new king for the nation of the Lombards. We beg of Almighty God that he may keep you in the way of his commandments, and that he may make the same, our most excellent son Adoaldus, to grow up in his love, so that, as he is here great amongst men, he may also by good deeds be glorious in the sight of God. . . . To our most excellent son, the royal Adoaldus, we have sent some relics, a cross containing some wood of the Cross of our Lord, and a copy of the holy Gospels enclosed in a precious case. To my daughter, his sister, I send three rings, two with jacinths and one with albula, which I beg you to give to them, that our affection may be established by means of your Excellence."[1]

Thus the worry and anxiety over the unhappy warfare continued with but a short interval throughout Gregory's reign. To appreciate his exertions in restraining the Lombards the actual circumstances should be weighed. A half-civilised, restless nation, firmly established in the country, was led by leaders eager for plunder and reckless of life. They devastated the lands, they pillaged towns and villages,

[1] Ep. xiv 12.

leaving them in ruins, they acted at various centres, distracting attention to parts widely distant. To oppose them there was no regular army: the Emperor was indifferent, the Exarch indolent and jealous, and apparently the sole power that prevented them from overrunning and conquering the whole kingdom was the monk-Pope, armed only with his voice, his pen, and his indomitable energy. Without men or material, without resources or allies, he kept them at bay for fifteen years by his letters, his tact, his vigilance, his personal influence. The lawless Lombard dukes respected him, he turned enemies into friends, he softened the roughness of their fierce nature, and they trusted his word while despising the oaths of the imperial officials. With a sufficient force at his disposal, peace and order would have been early established, probably without bloodshed; but the merit of Gregory's resistance was that, defenceless and isolated, he withstood the Lombards, restrained their conquests, and saved Italy. The permanent advantage to Italy of this fifteen years of restricted warfare consisted in the gradual conversion of the Lombards to the Catholic faith. When Gregory commenced to reign, the races were severed in religion as well as civilisation; when he died they were two nations side by side, one in faith, approaching each other in civilisation, with fewer motives for contentions and war. At his accession they knew not the Pope, but preyed upon the spasmodic defence of the imperial generals; at his death they disregarded the feeble efforts of the Empire, and they looked upon the Pope not only as prominent in temporal affairs, but as their spiritual father.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EMPEROR

THROUGHOUT his pontificate the relations between Rome and Constantinople were a source of much anxiety to Gregory. The well-worn contest between Pontiff and Caesar, Church and State, has assumed many phases during the course of centuries. In the last decade of the sixth century the Empire was fast losing its power without abating its pretensions. While the races of the West had thrown off its yoke, while the Avari, Slaves, and Persians were harassing the frontiers and exacting tribute, while Mahomet was growing into manhood at Mecca, the officials of the Court in rustling silks and glittering jewels prostrated themselves before the footstool of the reigning Emperor and offered him the incense of fulsome adulation. His person was sanctified, his words were blessed, his edicts holy, his palace sacred. The extravagant epithets addressed to the Pagan Caesars when adapted to Christian phraseology bordered on blasphemy, and the enervating climate turned the luxury of the later Roman Emperors into effeminacy.

On the other hand, contact with the rude, fierce tribes of the forest had hardened the Pontiffs in the school of rough usage. They had been jostled by the plundering Hun as he emptied their palaces, they had made way for the savage Goth as he swaggered along the Via Sacra, and day by day they dreaded

the appearance of the uncouth Lombard. The old luxury had long since vanished, siege after siege had defaced the buildings, pillage had stripped the palaces, poverty and slaughter had reduced the noble families, the untilled lands supplied scant provisions, so that the Pontiff breathed an atmosphere of hardship and suffering. Gregory, with his Court of roughly-clad monks in the Lateran, formed a striking contrast to the magnificence and stately ceremonial that surrounded the Emperor Maurice at Constantinople.

Rome still belonged to the Empire and Constantinople still submitted to the Church; the humble Gregory acknowledged himself a subject of the Emperor, and the much-flattered Maurice recognised the Pope as his spiritual father. Both ties were loosening; the neglect of the Emperor to protect his Italian subjects forced the Pope into a somewhat independent position in order to defend his churches, his clergy, and the faith. On the other hand, the supremacy of Constantinople, the lust of power and the incense of flattery led the Emperor to assume a control over matters ecclesiastical, and to covet spiritual influence as his temporal power waned. Thus Gregory occupied a position of extreme delicacy. While preserving the integrity of the imperial territory by separate negotiations with the enemy, he strove to manifest obedience to his temporal sovereign; while restraining the incursions of the Lombards, he strove to place no hindrance to their conversion; while asserting and exercising his spiritual authority, he strove to avoid a contest which might excite the East to spiritual revolt. His sojourn at Constantinople had taught him the temper of the

East, the subtleties of the Greek mind, the tortuous policy, the venality and corruption of the Court, the subservience and flattery of dignitaries, lay and clerical. To adjust temporal difficulties with spiritual interests in a Court lax of morals and luxurious in manners, so as to lose neither temporal protection nor spiritual authority while maintaining a friendly feeling, required consummate skill.

In his intercourse with the Court Gregory adopted Court language. He used the current exaggerated expressions that to modern ears smack of the Celestial Court of Pekin. Similar phrases are more or less in vogue in every Court; three hundred years ago an English courtier, writing to a Tudor or Stuart king, did not stint his words. The terms "Most Serene" and "Your Serenity," "Most Pious" and "Your Piety," "Most Clement" and "Your Clemency" have an affinity to "Your Grace," "Your Worship," and "Your Excellency," adopted even in our prosaic days. Then, as now, each official had his special mode of address, and Gregory, in using the terms "Glorious," "Illustrious," "Magnificent," distinguished different grades of rank, the owners of which were more jealous of their titles than modern Esquires, Right Honourables, and Gallant Members. So also in such phrases as "God has committed all things to him (the Emperor)," [1] "God has made your Piety the custodian of ecclesiastical peace;" [2] he followed the current method of speech without assigning the literal meaning; as a writer of to-day will say that the Parliament is omnipotent, or that the king can do no wrong.

[1] Ep. iii 66. [2] Ep. vii 6.

These epithets and expressions, occurring frequently throughout Gregory's letters, indicate his punctilious observance of the forms of etiquette and his refined consideration for the person addressed, rather than any subservience or cringing to those in position or authority, or too liberal a concession to the temporal power. Gregory inculcated and practised obedience to the secular power, while he strenuously upheld the freedom of spiritual authority. "When we offend against our superiors, we oppose his ordinance who placed them over us."[1] He lays down clearly the distinction between the two powers, and while for peace and conciliation he sometimes strains a point in submitting to the wishes of the Emperor, he plainly asserts the independence of spiritual power from imperial control. While he writes: "I yield obedience to their most Serene orders,"[2] he elsewhere writes: "Nor would his (the Emperor's) orders have any effect, for they are issued against the laws and sacred Canons, thus the contest between the parties remains undecided."[3] To the Emperor himself he says: "I am the servant of all priests as long as they live in a priestly manner. But if, through the swelling of vainglory, anyone stiffen his neck against the Almighty Lord and against the statutes of the Fathers, I trust in the Almighty Lord that he will not bend mine even with the sword."[4] So also he writes to Donus, Bishop of Messana: "In this affair the secular laws, as he knows and we have heard, hold that the heir is compelled to pay if the testator bequeaths what belongs to another, but since we

[1] *Lib. Past.* iii 4.
[2] Ep. v 20.
[3] Ep. xiv 8.
[4] Ep. v 20.

know that your Fraternity lives by the law of God, and not by the law of the State, it seems to me very unjust."[1]

When the Emperor had committed an unjust act, Gregory, without yielding, endeavoured to screen him, and with his customary consideration to offer him a golden bridge for retreat. The Emperor had unjustly assigned the castrum of Cassiopus, in the Island of Corcyra, to the Bishop of Euria, thereby injuring the church of Corcyra, to which it properly belonged. Gregory writes to Boniface, his legate at Constantinople: "In the beginning the aforesaid castrum of Cassiopus was seized by the most Serene Lord the Emperor against the decision of the Metropolitan of Nicopolis, who was supported by ecclesiastical right and canonical reason, and—a thing which we cannot hear without sorrow or speak of without grief—was delivered to the Bishop of Euria to the serious injury of the Bishop of Corcyra and his clergy, so that after the cessation of the jurisdiction of the church of Corcyra he exercises the chief authority there. We foresee that our sentence will be of no effect if we appear to contradict the command of the most Clement Lord the Emperor, or unwillingly bring discredit upon him. Wherefore, beloved, discreetly insinuate to his Piety and constantly reiterate that it is altogether unlawful, evil, unjust, and completely opposed to the sacred Canons, and therefore that he should not allow a sin of this kind to be introduced into the Church in his time. You will suggest, and strive to get him to adopt, the previous decision of the aforesaid Metropolitan,

[1] Ep. viii 3.

which decree has been confirmed by us, so that we may seem to have fittingly reserved to his Serenity to correct, after consideration, what he unjustly pronounced in haste. In this matter we should strive as far as possible that he himself should give the order by which he commands what has been decided by us. For by this all appearance of opposition will be taken away. Hasten, therefore, by the help of Almighty God, to exert your vigilance in smoothing these difficulties, so that the desire of those who plot evil may not prevail against the ancient prescription of ecclesiastical custom, nor this shameful business serve as a precedent."[1]

In 592 the Emperor enacted a law prohibiting all who were employed in official posts, or in military service, from entering the clerical state or taking the monastic habit before the expiration of their term of service. Maurice was probably influenced by the interests of the Empire rather than by opposition to religion, and intended it purely as a political enactment to safeguard the imperial service. Gregory acquiesced in the law so far as it affected the clerical state, which he considered rather as a change of occupation, but he regarded the prohibition to take the monastic habit as trenching on the liberty of each one to enter the service of the most High; if God called a soldier to a supernatural life, he was bound to obey God rather than man. The Emperor, as was customary in decrees touching the ecclesiastical powers, sent Gregory a copy of the law, requesting him to communicate it to the Metropolitans of the West, for by this means he trusted to obtain pontifical

[1] Ep. xiv 8.

approval for the decree. Gregory, unwilling to raise a quarrel by a violent protest, wrote a telling remonstrance to the Emperor, hoping to induce him to change his mind and rescind the decree. "He is guilty before Almighty God who is not sincere with the most Serene Lords in all that he does or speaks. In my words I, the unworthy servant of your Piety, now speak not as a bishop, not as a subject of the State, but as a private person, for, most Serene Lord, you were my Lord before you became Lord of all. From the illustrious Longinus I have received your decree, which, on account of illness, I have been unable to acknowledge. I gladly give my approval when the Piety of my Lords orders that those engaged in public administration shall not undertake ecclesiastical office, for I clearly understand that he who puts off his secular dress for ecclesiastical office, may wish to change his occupation rather than to leave the world. But I am completely astonished that by the same law he shall not enter a monastery, for, while his effects are taken by the monastery, it can be arranged that his debts also be accepted by the monastery which accepts him. For whoever with an earnest mind wishes to be converted, should first restore that which is ill-gotten, and the more speedily he thinks of his soul the more sincere will be his conversion. This law also adds that no one can be converted who has been marked on the hand.[1] I acknowledge to my Lords that I am filled with terror at this constitution, for to many it closes the

[1] Slaves and soldiers were often punctured in the hand, either for punishment or in order to distinguish them. The term "to be converted" signifies to enter a monastery.

way to heaven and forbids what was hitherto lawful. Many can live a good life in the world, and many cannot be saved before God unless they forsake all things. In speaking thus to my Lords, what am I but dust and a worm? But since I feel that this constitution is adverse to the interests of God the Creator of all, I cannot be silent before my Lords. For power over all men is given from on high to the Piety of my Lords, to help those who do well, and to open more widely the road to heaven, so that the earthly kingdom may serve the heavenly kingdom. Yet with an authoritative voice it is announced that he who has once enlisted in earthly soldiery cannot enrol himself under the banner of our Lord Jesus Christ until he has completed his service or been discarded for infirmity.

"To this Christ will reply through me, his and your lowliest servant: 'From a secretary I made you Count of the Guards, from Count of the Guards I made thee Caesar, from Caesar to be Emperor, and, more than this, the father of Emperors. I have committed my priests to your keeping, and will you withdraw your soldiers from my service?' Answer then, I beseech you, most Pious Lord, to your servant, what can you reply to your Lord when he shall come in judgement and ask you this?

"Perchance it is thought that none of these men would really be converted with a sincere intention. Yet I, your unworthy servant, have in my days known soldier-monks to work miracles and perform signs and wonders, but by this law any such are prohibited from becoming monks.

"I ask my Lord to inquire what Emperor first

made such a law,[1] and then seriously to ponder whether it should be imitated. This also should be carefully considered, that men are forbidden to renounce the world at a time when the end of the world approaches. There will not be long delay; in the burning heavens, in the burning earth, in the conflagration of the elements, attended by angels and archangels, thrones and dominations, principalities and powers, the terrible Judge will appear. If all your other sins are forgiven, and this law alone remains against you, what excuse, I ask, can you allege? Wherefore, I beseech you, by the same terrible Judge, not to let your many tears, your many prayers, your many fasts, your abundant alms be dimmed in the sight of God by any circumstance, but let your Piety mitigate this same law either by interpretation or by softening its rigour, for the army of my Lords will increase in the face of the enemy when the army of God shall have increased in prayer.

"In obedience to your order I have sent the same law to the different parts of the country. Because the law is not in accordance with the service of God, behold by the present supplication I have announced it to my most Serene Lords. To both I have done my duty; I have given obedience to the Emperor, and I have not been silent in what I felt was the cause of God."[2]

This letter, although respectful enough, Gregory did not think prudent to deliver direct to the Emperor, but sent it under cover to his friend Theodore,

[1] In Ep. iii 66, Gregory mentions that it was Julian the Apostate.

[2] Ep. iii 65.

one of the Court physicians, to whom he writes: "On account of my sins, and I know not at whose suggestion or advice, he issued last year such a grievous law that anyone who loves him sincerely will greatly lament. I could not reply to this law then, for I was ill. . . . Because these things grieve me very much, I have written to the same Lord, but your Glory will present him my letter privately at a fitting time. I do not wish it to be given to him publicly by my legate, because you, being more familiar with him, can speak more freely and openly to him about what concerns his soul, for he is exceedingly occupied, and his mind is scarcely ever disengaged from important cares. Do you, Glorious son, speak for Christ. If you are listened to, then will there be profit for the soul of your aforesaid Lord and for your own. If you are not attended to, the profit will be entirely your own." [1]

The Emperor, not unwilling to accede to the representation of Gregory, but at the same time not wishing publicly to retract the law, seems to have suffered it to fall into abeyance, asking the Pope to place some restriction on the reception of soldiers into monasteries. A little later Gregory writes a circular letter to the Metropolitans of Thessalonica, Macedonia, Milan, Nicopolis, Corinth, Prima Justiniana, Crete, Albania, Larissa, Ravenna, Sardinia, and all the bishops of Sicily. He refers to the law recently promulgated, and instructs them not to accept for ecclesiastical functions those who are engaged in an administrative capacity, nor to receive them into monasteries until they are completely free

[1] Ep. iii 66.

from their public responsibilities. "If any soldiers are desirous of entering a monastery, they are not to be easily received until their conduct is thoroughly investigated. And, according to regular rule, they are to be tried in their own dress for three years, and then, by God's help, to receive the monastic habit. If, thus tried and accepted, they wish to do penance for their sins for their souls' sake and for the sake of salvation and heavenly grace, their conversion is not to be refused. In this the most Serene and most Christian Emperor, believe me, is in every way satisfied, and freely allows the conversion of those whom he knows are not engaged in public responsibilities." [1] In a Synod, held in Rome in 595, at which twenty-two bishops, forty-four priests, and some deacons were present, the following decree was enacted: "Whence it is necessary that whoever desires to be converted to the service of God from the service of ecclesiastical and military law, should first be proved in the lay dress, and, if his conduct and conversation give good testimony of his desire, he shall be permitted, without retractation, to serve God in a monastery, so that he may freely retire from human service who seeks a stricter service in the employment of God." [2]

Another lengthy contest with the Imperial Court occurred over an appointment to the bishopric of Salona, in which the Emperor indirectly supported a favourite against the action of the Pope. At the death of Natalis, Gregory, expecting some trouble, writes to his agent, Antoninus: "With all possible insistence and solicitude hasten to admonish the

[1] Ep. viii 5. [2] Appendix ad Ep. v 6.

clergy and people of the same city to choose unanimously a priest to be consecrated, and, when the decree is ready, you will take care to send the person elected to us, so that he may be consecrated with our consent, as in the old times. But take every possible precaution that no bribery or personal influence of any kind prevail in the election. For if anyone shall be elected through the influence of others, after his consecration he will be compelled to pay all deference to their wishes, and thus the goods of the church will be diminished and ecclesiastical order will not be preserved."[1] He also wrote to the bishops of Dalmatia, telling them not to elect anyone without the permission of the Apostolic See, threatening them otherwise with excommunication. Recommending Honoratus, the archdeacon whom he had defended against Natalis, he concludes, "We have confidence in Almighty God, for, so far as it depends upon our intention, we shall never prescribe anything burdensome to our conscience or burdensome to your church. If the willing consent of all unite on one who is worthy before God, and no objection be raised against his consecration, we direct, by licence given in this our present letter, that he be consecrated by you in the church of Salona, excepting, however, the person of Maximus, about whom much evil is reported to us, which, if he does not cease from coveting higher dignities, serves, I think, to disqualify from office him who does such things."[2]

The clergy elected Honoratus, who merited Gregory's commendation by his probity, firmness, and prudence. Maximus seems also to have merited

[1] Ep. iii 22. [2] Ep. iv 10.

Gregory's suspicions, for, in spite of the Pope's letter, an armed force carried him into the cathedral, and there, thrusting aside the priests, deacons, and clergy, he was consecrated by excommunicated bishops. Gregory, justly indignant, writes to him, addressing him as Maximus the usurper: "Although the rest of a person's career may be meritorious, so that nothing debars him from sacerdotal ordination, yet the crime of ambition alone is condemned by the severest censure of the Canons. We learn that by the surreptitious or simulated orders of the most pious princes, and although unfit by your mode of life, you have snatched the venerated order of priesthood. We have believed this the more readily because your life and character are not unknown to us, and because we are not ignorant of the mind of the most Serene Lord the Emperor, who is not accustomed to interfere in the cause of priests, lest he burden himself with our sins. This unheard-of crime is added to the list that, after our interdict and excommunication of yourself and those consecrating you, thrusting aside priests, deacons, and clergy, you are said to have been installed by a military force. We cannot call it a consecration, because it was performed by excommunicated men. Since therefore, without the shadow of any precedent you have so outrageously violated the dignity of the priesthood, we order that—until we shall have learned from the imperial instructions, or from our delegates, that you were consecrated not by his surreptitious but by his true commands—neither you nor your consecrators shall presume to exercise any sacerdotal office, nor to approach the sacred altar until you hear from us.

If you shall presume to act contrary to this, may you be anathema from God and blessed Peter the Prince of the Apostles, so that, by seeing your judgement, other Catholic churches may take example from your punishment."[1]

How Maximus treated the authoritative prohibition may be learnt from a letter of Gregory to Sabinianus, his legate at Constantinople. "You know what has been done in the cause of the prevaricator, Maximus. After the most Serene Lord the Emperor sent his commands that he should by no means have been consecrated, then he broke out into greater pride, for he bribed the men of the patrician Romanus, who so supported him that they would have killed the sub-deacon Antoninus if he had not fled. After I knew that he was consecrated against right and against custom, I sent him a letter to prevent him from presuming to celebrate Mass until I learned from the most Serene Lords their orders about his person. These my letters, publicly announced and posted up in the city, he publicly caused to be torn down, and openly rose up in contempt of the Apostolic See. You know how I suffer from this, who am more ready to die than allow the Church of blessed Peter to degenerate in my days."[2]

Maximus sent his representatives to Constantinople to gain over the Emperor, and made counter accusations against Gregory, charging him amongst other things with imprisoning and putting to death Malchus, a bishop. In the same letter to his legate Gregory says: "I hear that he has sent a cleric who is unknown to me, and who says that Malchus the

[1] Ep. iv 20. [2] Ep. iv 47.

Bishop was killed in prison for his money. . . . The Bishop Malchus was never in prison, nor in any danger, but on the day on which he stated his cause and put in appearance, he went without my knowledge to the house of the notary Boniface, who gave him a banquet, and he dined there and was honoured, and died suddenly in the night, which I thought you, beloved brother, knew."

Through the representations of the chief men in Dalmatia, amongst whom bribes had been freely scattered, Maurice upheld the consecration, to the great grief and indignation of Gregory. The Emperor, moreover, wrote to the Pope asking him to receive Maximus with honour. In order, if possible, to avoid an absolute collision with Maurice, Gregory waived the point of consecration without his consent, and fixed on the other irregularities, and expresses his feelings in a letter to the Empress Constantina, in which he narrates the circumstances and continues, "Obedient to the precept of his Piety in regard to the same Maximus, who was consecrated without my knowledge, I have restrained my intentions about what in his consecration he presumed to ignore in me or my delegate as if he had been consecrated by my authority. His other perversity, however, the personal ill-deeds of which I know, whether he was elected for money, or whether while excommunicated he presumed to say Mass, I cannot, on account of my duty to God, pass over without investigation. But I trust and beg the Lord that nothing of what is alleged may be found in him, and that his cause may be decided without danger to my soul. But before these things are sifted, the most Serene Lord

has ordered, by his present command, that I should receive him with honour when he comes to me. It is very burdensome to honour, before inquiry or decision, a man against whom such serious charges are made. If the causes of the bishops committed to me are decided by our most Pious Lords through the influence of others, what in this unhappy state of affairs can I do in this Church? When my bishops contemn me and take refuge with secular judges, I give thanks to God, I impute it to my sins. This I will briefly say, that I shall wait a little time, but if he delays for long to come to me, I shall not for a moment hesitate to inflict upon him the canonical censure."[1]

Maximus, aware of their contents, cunningly contrived so as not to receive personally the letters prohibiting him from celebrating Mass, and Gregory formally repeated the prohibition. To avoid appearing at Rome after citation, Maximus alleged that the Emperor desired the Pope to send an envoy to hear the case at Ravenna. Gregory replied that he had received no order except that Maximus should go to Rome, citing him again to appear before him within thirty days, and telling him that, at the request of the Emperor, he overlooked the consecration without his consent, and would deal only with the other accusations. He ordered him not to molest Bishop Paulinus and the Archdeacon Honoratus, who had been persecuted for their opposition.[2] Gregory also wrote to the clergy and people of Salona, and to the clergy and people of Zara, to the effect that he was not moved by personal enmity, but wished thoroughly

[1] Ep. v 21. [2] Ep. vi 25.

to investigate the case, and expressed his surprise that so few had abstained from communion with Maximus, and begged them to urge him to appear at Rome. "His fault of pride is openly demonstrated, for when summoned to come to us he resists it, he avoids it, he fears it. Why should he fear if his conscience did not accuse him of the things proclaimed against him?"[1] Sabinianus, Bishop of Zara, who refused to refrain from communion with Maximus, was treated by Gregory as an abettor, was excommunicated, and summoned to Rome.[2] Eventually convinced of his fault through Gregory's representations, he left his episcopal charge and retired to a monastery to do penance. Moved by this sign of submission and repentance, Gregory at once forgot the past, received him into friendship, and wrote a paternal letter begging him to resume his episcopal functions.[3] To his friend Marcellus, who pleads in a friendly way for Maximus, Gregory writes: "Ecclesiastical discipline will not allow us in any way to leave this without correction, nor does it become you to ask it, lest we seem to consent not to rectitude but to neglect of discipline."[4]

With Maximus himself efforts were continued to bring him to obedience. He represented that the Lombard forces prevented his access to Rome, and obtained a request from the Emperor to have the case tried at Salona or in Dalmatia. Gregory, yielding to the persuasion of the Exarch Callinicus, ultimately consented that Maximus should appear at Ravenna to make his submission, and in the pre-

[1] Ep. vi 26, 27.
[2] Ep. vii 17.
[3] Ep. viii 10.
[4] Ep. iv 40.

sence of Marinianus the Bishop and Castorius, a Roman notary, should purge himself of the crime of simony, and take an oath before the tomb of St Apollinaris that he was innocent of the other crimes imputed to him. His rebellion and treason to the Holy See were manifest, and before any further proceeding Maximus did public penance. He remained for three hours prostrate in presence of the Bishop, the Exarch, and clergy, and with every sign of repentance kept crying out, "I have sinned against God and the blessed Pope Gregory." He took the oath at the tomb of St Apollinaris, and, as a mark of forgiveness, the notary Castorius handed him a letter from Gregory that was prepared beforehand, in which the Pope tendered his fraternal friendship, reinstated him in his see, and offered to send him the pallium: "Since, at length, acting on good advice, you have humbly submitted yourself to the yoke of obedience, and by doing penance have purged yourself by due satisfaction as we enjoined, understand that we rejoice in the restoration of the grace of fraternal charity and receive you again into our fellowship, for as we ought to be severe with those who persist in their fault, so also should we be merciful to those who renounce it. As soon as your Fraternity knows that you are restored to communion with the Apostolic See, send someone to us who may, as usual, take the pallium to you."[1] Thus happily ended the contest which had been protracted for ten years.

Gregory was not slow in raising his voice in favour of the oppressed and of sufferers from the rapacity

[1] Ep. ix 81.

and greed of the imperial officials. In the Greek Empire the administrative powers were not separated from the judicial; he who levied the tax judged his victim. The dukes exacted military taxes, the judges and defensors extorted civil taxes, the Exarch imposed them at pleasure; the only vestige of disinterested government was found in the bishops. Trusting to distance for impunity, the officials in Italy oppressed the people with cruel extortion. In many cases Gregory more prudently addressed his applications to the Empress, for thereby he excited her interest and secured her influence with her husband. He commences a letter to Constantina, "Since I know that our most Serene Lady directs her thoughts to the heavenly kingdom and the good of her soul, I think I should commit a grievous fault if I were silent in what touches the fear of Almighty God." He then tells her that idolatry existed in Sardinia, that he had sent there a bishop who had made many conversions, and who reported to him that the local imperial judges imposed a tax on the inhabitants for permission to worship idols, and that even after baptism he still exacted the tax. He adds that in Corsica the exactions of the officials are so grievous that people, in order to pay them, actually sold their children, and that they found it easier to live by fleeing to the protection of the Lombards. He also mentions that the atrocities of Stephen, the imperial agent in Sicily, are so numerous that he cannot recount them. He continues: "All this our most Serene Lady will prudently investigate, and she will suppress the groans of the oppressed, for I anticipate that these atrocities have not yet reached

your most pious ears, for, if they had, they would not now exist. These things should be mentioned to the most Pious Lord at a fitting time, so that he may remove this great burden of sin from his soul, his empire, and his children. I know that he will say that as much money has been expended in Italy as has been gathered in these islands. To this I will answer that he should free his empire from the tears of the oppressed, even if less money be expended in Italy. For doubtless so great expenses in this land will avail the less for its benefit, when they are collected with admixture of sin. Let then the most Serene Lords order that nothing shall be sinfully collected, and I am certain that if, through this, less is gathered for the purposes of the State, the State will, in reality, be the better assisted. Even if it should happen that less assistance be sent to Italy through diminished receipts, yet it is better for us to suffer temporal loss than that it should be an obstacle to your eternal life. Think what the minds, what the bowels of those parents must endure, who sell their children in order to save themselves from torture. Those know best how to pity the children of others who have children of their own. Hence it suffices for me briefly to mention these things, lest, if your Piety had not known what is done in these parts, the fault of my silence should be arraigned by the strict judge." [1]

The correspondence was not entirely of an unpleasant nature; Gregory writes to thank the Emperor for alms sent to relieve the distress in Rome: "The Piety of my Lord, which is accus-

[1] Ep. v 41.

tomed mercifully to help his children, has been so graciously manifested by his assistance that the want of all the distressed is taken away by the consolation of his bounty. For which with tearful prayer we all ask that Almighty God, who has moved the heart of your Clemency to this beneficence, may preserve the empire of my Lords in the constancy of his love, and extend their victories over all nations by the help of his Majesty. . . . Hence one and all together we pray for the life of my Lords, that Almighty God may grant you lengthened days and a quiet time, and may grant that the most happy reign of your Piety may long continue over the Roman Republic." [1]

Thus Gregory continued his difficult and delicate transactions with the Emperor, respectful yet firm, yielding in form and expression yet tenacious to principle, considerate for the imperial dignity yet persistent for justice, palliating faults yet fearlessly exposing them. He maintained his own dignity: while submissive to the imperial authority, he abated nothing of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction; while the humble and worthless servant of the empire, he was the champion and defender of the See of Peter. One letter of the series to the Emperor has caused much controversy, and is considered by some as the single stain on the fame of Gregory. The Emperor Maurice fell a victim to one of those tragic episodes of Eastern story that associate cruelty with magnificence. His government relapsed into the customary faults of Eastern despotism, resulting in extortion, bad finance, extravagance and cupidity: property was not sacred, forced loans were exacted, wills were not

[1] Ep. v 30.

respected, and personal liberty was precarious. In the capital and the provinces distress prevailed, and considerable discontent found expression. Rome suffered equally with the rest of the empire, and Gregory despondently writes to Rusticiana, a lady friend at Constantinople: "Whenever anyone comes to us from the royal city I inquire after your health, and for my sins I always hear what grieves me. . . . For myself, I live in the midst of lamentations and occupations, so that I grieve that I have reached the times in which I live, and my only consolation is the expectation of death. Hence I ask you to pray for me, that I may quickly be released from this prison of flesh and be tortured no longer by so many sorrows."[1] He then mentions the exactions of Beatoris, an imperial official who had greatly afflicted the Romans under pretext of the public welfare, and begs her intercession with the Emperor Maurice to restrain him. This letter was written in February, 603, and soon afterwards news reached Rome that the army had taken advantage of the general discontent to raise one of their officers, Phocas, to the imperial throne, that Maurice had fled, and that in November, 602, the Senate and people had proclaimed Phocas Emperor. According to custom, the accession of the new Emperor was announced at Rome by a solemn embassy, which arrived in April with the images of Phocas and his Empress Leontia. Although the person and character of Phocas were unknown to the Romans, they received the intelligence and the images with the customary ceremonies and enthusiasm, trusting to the lavish promises of

[1] Ep. xiii 22.

clemency and justice by which the new Emperor proposed to remedy the evils and allay the discontent caused by the misrule of Maurice. On April 25 the embassy, with the Exarch, entered Rome, went in solemn procession to the Lateran, installed the imperial images in the basilica Julia, one of the halls of the palace, received the homage of the Romans with lights and incense, and excited the ringing acclamations of the people by a proclamation of the new Emperor, addressed to the Pope and people, and couched in terms adapted to the occasion.

By the returning ambassadors Gregory sent the following letter to Phocas in April-May, 603: "Glory to God in the highest, who, as is written, worketh changes and transfers kingdoms, which he hath made known to all when he deigned to speak by his prophet: *That the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and he will give it to whomsoever shall please him.*[1] For in the incomprehensible dispensation of Almighty God there are alternate vicissitudes of mortal life: sometimes, for the punishment of the sins of many, someone is raised up through whose oppression the necks of subjects are driven under the yoke of tribulation, and this we have experienced in our long-continued affliction. But sometimes, when the merciful God has determined to refresh the sorrowing hearts of many by his consolation, he raises someone to the summit of power, and by the bowels of his mercy pours the grace of his joy into the minds of all. We believe that we are more quickly strengthened in the abundance of this joy when we rejoice that the graciousness of your Piety has attained

[1] Dan. iv 14.

the imperial dignity. *Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad*,[1] and may the whole Republic and people, hitherto grievously afflicted, give expression to their joy at your gracious acts. May the proud spirit of our enemies be subdued under the yoke of your rule. May the broken and depressed spirit of your subjects be lifted up again by your Clemency. May the power of heavenly grace make you terrible to your enemies, and graciously merciful to your subjects. May the whole Republic enjoy tranquillity in your most happy times, bringing forth the spoils of peace under the shadow of just laws. May there be an end to the abuse of wills and the violent exaction of gifts. May security in the possession of property be restored, so that all may hold without fear what is acquired without fraud. May each one regain his liberty under the gentle sway of a pious empire. In this the kings of the nations and the empire of the Republic differ—the kings of the nations are masters of slaves, the empire of the Republic is the master of freemen. But we recount these things better by prayer than by speech. May the Almighty God in every thought and deed uphold the heart of your Piety by the hand of his grace, and may the Holy Spirit dwelling in your breast dispose mercifully and justly whatever you do, that your Clemency may be exalted in the earthly kingdom, and after the course of many years may attain the kingdom of heaven." [2]

To Leontia he writes: "What tongue can express, what mind can picture the fervent thanks that we owe to Almighty God for the serenity of your empire,

[1] Ps. xcv 2. [2] Ep. xiii 31.

since the grievous burdens of so many years are removed from our backs, and there has returned the gentle yoke of imperial power which your subjects can bear? Let the angelic choir give glory to the Creator of all things in heaven, and let thanksgiving be offered by men on earth."[1]

The further proceedings of Phocas gradually came to hand. Deformed in body and depraved in mind, he presented the typical features of a tyrant: his shaggy eyebrows, red hair, beardless chin, and an ugly scar on his cheek denoted his illiterate, sensuous, passionate and cruel mind. A few days after his accession he ordered the deposed Emperor and his sons, Tiberius, Peter, Paul, Justin, and Justinian, to be executed at Chalcedon. As his sons were butchered before the eyes of their father, Maurice exclaimed, "Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgements are right," and he prevented a faithful nurse from substituting an infant of her own in place of one of his children. After the murder of his sons the Emperor himself was beheaded, the heads being exposed at Constantinople until putrefaction commenced, and the bodies cast into the sea. The eldest son, Theodosius, was arrested at Nicea on his way to Persia, and there murdered. Under the guarantee of the Patriarch for their safety, the Empress Constantina with her three daughters took sanctuary in the church of St Sophia, but they were dragged from its precincts and beheaded. The Emperor's brother Peter was also cruelly executed.

In view of these atrocities the above letter of

[1] Ep. xiii 39.

Gregory has caused much comment, under the supposition that he could not have been ignorant of the character and crimes of Phocas. From Gregory's own character, his hatred of iniquity, and his fearless exposure of crime, it seems impossible that, when he penned the letter, he could have been cognisant of the events subsequent to the coronation of Phocas. In February, when he wrote to Rusticiana, he had not heard of the revolution that took place in the previous November; he makes no mention of it in intervening letters, he had no legate at Constantinople at the time, the navigation of the Bosphorus was closed during the winter months, and the overland route was slow and precarious, so that probably the first intimation of the event was conveyed through the ambassadors, who would announce as much or as little as their instructions allowed. The letter, which according to recent investigation is assigned to the end of April or the beginning of May, was probably entrusted to the ambassadors to deliver on their return, and from the nature of its contents seems to be merely a suitable reply to the flattering and gracious terms of the proclamation. The letter does not betray any previous knowledge of Phocas, and a separate letter accompanied it announcing the appointment of a legate and pleading for Italy, which gives it still more the character of a congratulatory reply to the Emperor's promises. Gregory had known Maurice intimately during his sojourn at Constantinople, had been godfather to one of the princes, had been on the most friendly terms with the Empress Constantina, as his letters to her testify, and it is hardly credible, and is contrary to the extant evidence of his dis-

position, to suppose that he could have known of the butchery of the whole family, and express his joy at the relief. It is significant that during the eleven months that Gregory survived he did not again write to Phocas, as if he was so struck with horror at his crimes and aversion to his character as to think any remonstrance hopeless.

CHAPTER IX

THE PATRIMONY OF ST PETER

Amid the cares and turmoils of ecclesiastical, military, and civil affairs, it is refreshing to meet the great Pontiff in the guise of a great landlord. The thoroughness and versatility of his mind are manifested in the minuteness with which he enters into questions of tenant and farmer, rents and taxes, the price and distribution of corn, and the general management of an estate. The patrimony of the Church consisted of lands and houses offered at various times to the Roman See by donation or bequest. The gradual accumulation comprised a considerable territory, and included estates and even towns in Tuscany, Campania, Calabria, Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, Dalmatia, Illyricum, Gaul, and Africa. Situated in different countries, the farms and estates varied in character and value, and after defraying all expenses, the rents, paid sometimes in coin and sometimes in produce, were sent to Rome for the disposal of the Pontiff. By this means Gregory was able to bear the cost of ecclesiastical government, to meet the charges entailed by the incursions of the Lombards, and to keep up his vast charities in Rome and over the world; he always looked upon the revenue as the heritage of the poor.

At fixed centres agents were appointed to manage the property, who were called rectors and defensors,

and were directly responsible to the Pontiff. Gregory always nominated clerics to the post, gave them rank equal to priests, and took every pains to secure competent men. Their ordinary duties consisted in the administration of the property, supervision of the tenants, dispensing alms, protection of the poor and widows, redemption of captives, and management of hospitals. In addition Gregory placed special ecclesiastical matters under their charge: the election of bishops, inquiry into clerical disorders, and settlement of differences and quarrels with laymen when practicable. He exacted a strict account from them at stated periods, and was rigorous in insisting on the faithful fulfilment of his orders.

On his first appointment each one made a solemn promise of fidelity, and undertook to act for the welfare of the poor and the Church according to the Pope's instructions. The following is the appointment of Vitus: "Provided that you have no impediment in your condition or person, and that you are not a cleric attached to another church, and that the Statutes of the Canons do not forbid it, it is our desire that for the benefit of the Church you undertake the office of Defensor of the Church, and honestly and diligently execute whatever shall be commanded by us for the welfare of the poor. You will use the privilege, which after mature deliberation we have conferred upon you, so as to show your fidelity in fulfilling our commands, and shall render to us an account of your actions, subject to the judgement of our God." [1]

The instructions given to one of his agents in

[1] Ep. xi 38.

Sicily indicate Gregory's views of the office: "All these things inflexibly correct, for then will you be a true soldier of blessed Peter the Apostle, when in his causes you cling firmly to the truth without any deviation. If you consider that anything justly belongs to the ecclesiastical property, take care that you never attempt to vindicate it by force, and this because it is ordered under anathema never to enforce by might a title of our Church, either in the urban or rural estate, but whatever by right belongs to the poor shall be defended by right, lest in the management of goods, what is justly maintained by us before Almighty God, may be contaminated by injustice. I trust that noble laymen and officials will love you for your humility, and not detest you for your pride. If you should learn that they have inflicted injustice on the poor, forthwith turn humility into firmness, so that you may always be to them a servant when they do well and an adversary when they do ill. But so act that your humility may not be remiss, nor your authority rigid, and that uprightness may season humility, and humility may render your uprightness pleasing."[1]

To the peasants themselves he writes: "I wish you to know that our appointment has placed you under the care of our Defensor. We order you therefore to obey, without any hesitation, whatever he shall command or enjoin for the benefit of the Church. We have given him full power to correct with severe punishment the disobedient or contumacious. We have also enjoined his solicitude at once to invoke the ecclesiastical law in recalling slaves

[1] Ep. i 36.

who may abscond, or when the boundaries of others are violated by anyone. You will know also that at his own peril he has been warned not to offer violence to anyone's property, or to seize anything by force under any pretence."[1]

The continuous wars of the sixth century had completely deranged the tenure of land and the routine of agriculture. The harsh and oppressive exaction of the imperial and local taxes, and the distance from the central authority, combined with the venality of the imperial judges, enabled owners of land to practise great cruelties and injustice with impunity. The example of their neighbours and the absence of supervision had led the agents of the patrimony to join in the general abuses, to use their position for their own advantage, and to involve the Church estates in confusion and disorder. Gregory prepared at once to grapple with these evils; through his exertions the estates were well managed, they improved in value, and became the nucleus of those possessions that developed into the temporal sovereignty of the Holy See. The prevalence of oppression and hardship amongst the country people immediately engaged Gregory's interest in the condition of tenants and labourers on the Church lands. In the tenure of the farmers he secured them against arbitrary eviction, and in the payment of rent he alleviated the burdens which hard times made grievous.

Many of the methods of oppression and exaction may be gathered from his letters which were written for the purpose of mitigating them. To Peter, his

[1] Ep. ix 19.

agent in Sicily, he says: "We learn that most unjust exactions continue in some of the farms of the Church, so that the farmers extort at the rate of $73\frac{1}{2}$ *solidi* to one golden pound, which is shameful, and not content with this, they are said to exact something in addition as interest for many years. This we altogether condemn, and wish it to be completely eradicated from the patrimony. Your Experience will consider whether in this excess, or in lesser burdens, anything is taken from the peasants unreasonably, and will bring all these things under the sum payable for rent, so that, as far as their means will allow, the peasants may pay the full and properly weighed-out rent at the rate of 72 *solidi* to the pound. Nor should additions be exacted besides the weights, nor a heavier pound, nor greater burdens over and above the pound, but in your valuation increase the rent according to their ability to pay, so as to include everything, and so that there may be no longer any disgraceful exaction. Lest after my death the burdens beyond what is due, which we have abolished by increasing the chief rent, may again in any way be imposed, and the peasant forced to pay not only the increased rent but the additional burdens, we wish you to give them leases for their rents, in which you will state clearly how much rent each one ought to pay, and also that all additions, burdens, and charges are abolished. . . .

"We learn also that the farmers often borrow forcibly from the tenants, and although exacted by the farmer, the loan is never repaid, in which case we order that whatever is taken violently from a family shall be restored to it, and that it shall in no

way benefit us, lest we ourselves seem to be the authors of violence. We also wish, when your Experience employs your tenants for any purpose outside the patrimony, that they receive due payment for it, so that it may benefit them, for we are unwilling to soil the purse of the Church with ill-gotten gains. Moreover we order your Experience to see that the tenants in the farms of the Church never involve themselves in loans, lest being burdened by the loans the farmers frequently change, from which change what can result except that the ecclesiastical lands remain untilled? Instead of which let this be regulated in their leases in the same way as the rent. For barns and storehouses we wish you not to receive more than is customary from the farms of the Church: what we order you to buy, purchase from strangers."[1]

The loans here referred to were obtained from the money-lenders, who charged exorbitant interest. In another letter Gregory allows the farmers to advance money to the peasants: "You had written that loans of money had been advanced by some of the farmers to the tenants, lest by borrowing from others they become involved in difficulties, or suffer in the price of things. This is very pleasing to me, and if I have already written about it, keep to what I have written. But if, as I suspect, I have given you no definite authority, have no hesitation in advancing money for the benefit of the peasants, when the ecclesiastical property does not suffer, and the operations of the peasants are assisted. And do anything else you consider for their benefit without any scruple."[2] So

[1] Ep. i 44. [2] Ep. v 8.

also to Peter he writes: "We learn, moreover, that the first instalment of rent so grievously inconveniences our peasants that before they are able to sell their labour they are forced to pay the taxes, and not having wherewith to pay, obtain money from public money-lenders, paying heavy interest for the accommodation, and are thereby involved in many difficulties. We hereby order you, therefore, that whatever loans they would have obtained in this way from strangers, your Experience shall advance, so that the peasants shall receive the loan, a little at a time, as they require it, lest when they get into difficulties, what would afterwards have sufficed to extricate them would not be at all sufficient by its being sold under compulsion at a low price."[1]

The rents were mostly paid in produce, and a favourite method of extortion consisted in the use of unjust measures. Gregory thus blames Pantaleon for a proceeding of this kind: "You should have always before your eyes your faith and the fear of blessed Peter the Apostle, and so act that you may be blamed neither by men in this life nor by Almighty God in the next. We learn from Salerius, our Cartularius, that the measure in which the peasants of the Church are forced to pay their corn contains twenty-five *sexterii*.[2] This we altogether reprobate, and grieve that you have so tardily discovered it. We are glad that you have broken the measure and substituted a just one. The aforesaid Cartularius has endeavoured to estimate for us the sum which has been collected by the frauds of the farmers from

[1] Ep. i 44.

[2] The true measure should contain sixteen only.

the two territories under your Experience. Since we rejoice that you have broken the unjust measure because we look to the future, so also we think of past sins, lest what the farmers have fraudulently taken from the peasants may affect us, and the sins committed by them be attributed to us. Therefore we wish in the fear of God, and bearing in mind the severity of blessed Peter the Apostle, that your Experience, with all exactness and sincerity, should make a list of the poor and indigent peasants on each farm, and purchase cows, sheep, and pigs with the money arising from the frauds, and distribute them among the poor peasants."[1] He speaks of the same to Peter: "Above all we wish you to be careful that no unjust measures are used in exacting the rents. If you find any such break them and provide new and proper ones."[2]

He calls attention to other exactions: "We hear that the peasants of the Church are greatly harassed in the price of corn, so that in buying from them in times of abundance the current price is not adhered to. We wish that at all times the index of price for them shall be the market price, be it high or low . . .

"It has come to our ears that excessive fees are exacted for the marriages of peasants, in which matter we order that fees for any marriage shall never exceed the sum of one *solidus*. The poor ought to give even less, but the rich are never to give more than the aforesaid sum of one *solidus*, and we do not wish the marriage fees to be entered into our accounts, but to go to the benefit of the farmers.

[1] Ep. xiii 34. [2] Ep. i 44.

"We learn that the relatives of some deceased farmers are not allowed to inherit, but that the effects are taken for the use of the Church. We order that the relatives of those who die on the Church lands shall take the succession as heirs, and shall not be deprived of any of the estate of the deceased. If anyone should leave young children, choose out discreet persons to whom the relatives may entrust the estate to be managed until the children reach a suitable age." [1]

The following letter to an agent testifies to his considerateness as a landlord: "Adeodatus, the bearer of this, has many years ago put up a building on land belonging to our Church, on condition that he pays two *solidi* a year to the ecclesiastical revenue, and after his death the land with the building upon it shall belong without doubt to the Church. Since he asserts that he is reduced to such poverty that he cannot pay the two *solidi* a year as he promised, and asks to be released one *solidus*, your Experience will look to it, and if what he states is clear, we wish the half to be remitted, so that he only pays one *solidus* a year, for his age and poverty indicate that the burden he petitions for should be remitted." [2]

Even the wage of an ordinary workman was not beneath the notice of the great Pontiff: "Alexander, the bearer of this, a peasant of our Church, complains to us that he worked for the space of three years in a building, namely, the church erected at Catania by our beloved son Cyprian the Deacon, and has not received proper pay. And although he is said

[1] Ep. i 44. [2] Ep. xii 9.

to have worked during the same time before many witnesses, as you had notice when you were here, yet we order you diligently to inquire into it, and if he has worked at the same building more than he has received wages for, we wish that whatever he has earned according to the current rate of wages beyond four *solidi* and a third, which he is said to have received from the aforesaid deacon, you will see that the just amount is given to him, and put it down in your accounts."[1]

The following illustrates how Gregory combined mercy with business-like shrewdness: "The bearer of this, Cosmas, a Syrian, alleges that in business he has contracted a debt, which by the testimony of others and his own tears we believe to be true. Since he owes one hundred and fifty *solidi*, I wish that in some way his creditors should come to terms with him, for the law does not allow a free man to be imprisoned for debt if he has not sufficient effects to meet it. He asserts that it is possible that his creditors will take eighty *solidi*. But since it is a good deal to ask eighty *solidi* from a man who has nothing, we have sent you sixty *solidi* by your notary, so that you may skilfully talk with his creditors, and allege as a reason that they are said to have taken possession of his child, which by the laws they had no right to do, and possibly they may agree to something less than we have sent. Whatever may be over from the sixty *solidi* give to the man himself for the support of himself and his son. If nothing remains, strive that his debt comes within the same sum by his labouring afterwards for nothing. Take special care

[1] Ep. viii 32.

when they receive the money that they give him a full discharge in writing."[1]

The above extracts suffice to show the efforts of Gregory in securing justice for his tenants and protecting them from oppression. The following chatty letter to his agent in Sicily, given almost in its entirety, indicates the variety of topics to which Gregory devoted his attention: "Many Jews dwell on the Church farms, and if they desire to become Christians, I wish that they should have some rent remitted, so that others influenced by this concession may be induced to express the same desire.

"Cows that are sterile from age, and male oxen that are of no further use, should be sold, so that their price at least may be turned to some purpose. We have studs of horses that are quite useless, and I wish them to be disposed of, and only four hundred younger ones kept for breeding, which ought to be entrusted to four hundred different farmers, so that they may bring in something every year, for it is very hard to pay the keepers sixty *solidi* and not get sixty *denarii* from the studs. Let your Experience do this, so that some may be lent out amongst the farmers and others sold and turned into money. Distribute the keepers through the estate, by which they may be of some service in cultivating the land. All the bronze vessels in Syracuse and Palermo that belong to the Church should be sold before they perish from age.

"When our brother Cyriacus came to Rome I diligently inquired of him whether you received a gratuity conscientiously in the case of a certain

[1] Ep. iv 45.

woman. The same brother replied that he knew it from yourself, for he was sent from you to certify who it was that gave the gratuity. This I believed and at once took him familiarly into favour: I introduced him to the people and clergy, I advanced him in the presbytery, I gave him a higher position amongst the defensors, and praised his trustworthiness before all, and this because he acted so faithfully in your service, and I quickly sent him back to you. Since you are in a great hurry, and although suffering from illness, I want to see you, and you have now a fully competent person to leave in your place at Syracuse, come yourself to me quickly, so that, if pleasing to Almighty God, we can talk over whether he shall remain there, or whether we shall appoint someone else in your place. I have also sent Benenatus the notary to take your place at Palermo if pleasing to Almighty God.

"I have severely scolded Romanus for his levity, for I now find that in the hospital which he administered he was more occupied over his own business than its affairs. If you think it prudent leave him in your place, but take the precaution of frightening him and admonishing him, so that he may learn how to behave gently and considerately to the peasants, and altogether change his conduct and action towards strangers and citizens. In saying this I do not select anyone, but leave it to your discretion. In the district of Palermo it will satisfy me if you choose one of your servants. I wish you also to provide for the district of Syracuse. When you come bring with you the moneys and ornaments of Antoninus, either in part or in substance. Bring also the rents

that you have for this and last year, and all your accounts. Try, if it please God, to arrive in Rome before the feast of St. Cyprian, lest from the signs that at this time always threaten on the sea, some danger, which God forbid, should take place.

"You are aware that because I reproved Pretiosus, the servant of God, for a slight fault, I have driven him from me sorrowful and embittered, and I am not lightly troubled in my mind. I wrote to the Bishop that he ought to send him to me if he would, but he was quite unwilling. I ought not, and cannot distress him, for occupied in the cause of God he ought to be encouraged with consolation and not depressed with trials. I hear the same Pretiosus is quite distressed that he cannot come back to me. But as I said, I cannot distress the Bishop, who will not let him go, and between the two I remain doubtful. Do you then, if you have greater wisdom in a small body, so arrange the matter that I may have what I want and not distress the Bishop. If, however, you see him in the least distressed, say nothing at all about it. I learn with regret that he has excommunicated Eusebius, a man of great age and infirmity. Hence you must tell the same bishop not to be hasty in giving sentence, for causes that are to be decided by sentence should be weighed beforehand with studious and most elaborate care.

"When the recruiting officers come, for I hear they have already collected the recruits, tell the servant who takes your place to offer them a small present, in order to render them more placable to him. So, also, before you come give something to the Praetors according to custom, but do it by the

hand of your substitute that you may conciliate their favour for him. Lest we be looked upon as altogether inhuman, tell your substitute to do exactly what I have ordered about distributions to individuals and monasteries. When you come we will, by the help of God, talk over how it is to be arranged. But I do not think you should leave to their arbitrary choice the three hundred *solidi* that I directed to be given to the poor, but assign them to particular places and persons.

"I recollect that I have already written to you that the legacies due to us from the will of Antoninus should have been paid to monasteries and others. I do not know why you have delayed in doing this, hence we wish that you pay our portion of these legacies from the money of the Church, so that when you come to me you may not leave behind you the groans of the poor; bring also the securities that were found in the estate of Antoninus.

"Romanus tells me that the wife of Redemptus at her death gave verbal orders that a silver shell should be sold and given to her freedmen; she also left a silver salver to some monastery; in both cases we wish her dispositions to be carried out, lest we be liable for great sins through little things.

"The brother of Marinianus the Abbot tells me that the building in the Pretorian monastery is not yet half finished. What else but your zeal can I praise for this? But now that you are warned, stir yourself and hasten the building of the monastery as far as you can. I said that I should give nothing towards expenses, but I did not forbid them to erect the building. Be sure to enjoin your substitute at

Palermo to be energetic in the construction of the same monastery at the expense of the ecclesiastical revenue, so that the complaints of the Abbot may not reach me.

"Moreover, I am aware that you know that certain things and several farms belong to other people, but from the entreaties of some, and the fear of others, you are afraid to restore them to these men. If you are truly a Christian you would fear the judgement of God rather than the voice of men. Attend to this, for I have unceasingly reminded you of it, and if you neglect it you will have my voice also as a witness against you. . . .

"You have sent me one wretched horse and five good asses. I cannot sit upon the horse because it is so wretched, and I cannot use the asses because they are asses: we ask you if you wish to please us, to send us things that are serviceable. We wish you to give Eusebius the Abbot one hundred gold pieces, and put it down in your accounts. We hear that Sisinius, who was judge in Samnium, is suffering great want in Sicily; we wish him to have twenty vessels of wine and four *solidi* annually. Anastasia, a religious, is said to be living in the oratory of St Agnes, near the city of Palermo; give her six gold pieces. To the mother of Praepositus Urbicus give six *solidi*, and put it in your accounts. The book of the Heptateuch from the estate of Antoninus give to the Pretorian monastery, the rest bring with you."[1]

The patrimony of the Church was worked partly by slaves. The institution of slavery formed an

[1] Ep. ii 32.

integral portion of the social system of the time, both in the East and in the West. Dating back through many ages, neither republic nor empire, neither revolution nor irruption of barbarians made any alteration in slavery; it was too firmly established, and was mixed up in every relation of life, and probably slave and master but little adverted to the state of degradation. In many cases the lot of the slave was more enviable than that of the free peasant: easy work, kind or indolent masters, security of sustenance, and no anxiety for the future, made life tolerable. With others the greed or cruelty of the masters entailed much hardship and suffering on the slaves. The law gave them but little protection from harsh treatment; they were chattels, and had no opportunity of appealing to the tribunals. The Church mitigated the oppression, inculcated kindness and forbearance, and set an example to other masters in the care of the slaves attached to Church property.

Gregory, in his universal sympathy for all distress, did not neglect to ameliorate the lot of the slaves. He gave opportunities of redress to those suffering from the oppression of others, dealt tenderly with those who belonged to the Church, and frequently spent the revenue of the patrimony in freeing or purchasing those whose condition seemed hopeless. He freed some of the patrimony slaves, and in a formal letter manumitting two of them he strikes the key-note of the cry that in modern times led to the abolition of slavery. "Since our Redeemer, the Maker of every creature, mercifully assumed our human flesh, in order that, by breaking the bond of servitude in which we were held, the grace of his

divinity might restore us to our original liberty, it is a wholesome deed by the benefit of manumission to restore the liberty in which they were born to men whom Nature in the beginning brought forth free, but whom the law of nations has subjected to the yoke of slavery. Wherefore from a motive of piety, and urged by the above consideration, we declare you, Montana and Thomas, servants of the holy Roman Church, which by the help of God we serve, to be from this day free and Roman citizens, and grant to you all your *peculium*.[1] . . . This document of manumission we have dictated to be written by Paterius the notary, and have confirmed it by our own signature, together with those of three priests of dignity and three deacons, and have delivered to you."[2] Montana entered religion, and Thomas became a notary.

Gregory took advantage of an existing law to recover Christian slaves from the power of Jews and Pagans. In the patrimony he released them without any payment, and elsewhere he often purchased and freed them. In a letter to Brunehalt, Queen of the Franks, he states the reason of the law: "We are moreover very much astonished why in your kingdom you allow Jews to own Christian slaves. For what are Christians but members of Christ? We well know that you faithfully honour the head of the members, but your Excellency will consider how different it is to honour the head, and allow the members to be trampled on by the enemy."[3] He

[1] That is whatever a slave was able to gather together, and which legally belonged to his master.

[2] Ep. vi 12.

[3] Ep. ix 109.

writes to the Prefect of Sicily: "It is said that Narses, the most wicked of the Jews, has bought a Christian slave, and employs him in his service. Your Glory will strictly inquire into it, and however he may have bought the Christian slave, give him his liberty without hesitation according to law, lest the Christian religion while subject to the Jews be polluted. Correct this most strictly with all speed, that we may be able both to return thanks for your discipline, and to bear testimony to your goodness when necessary."[1]

A Jewish or Pagan slave under a desire or pretence of becoming a Christian, occasionally took refuge in a church, or otherwise announced his wish. Gregory explains to the Bishop of Naples the process to be adopted: "Your Fraternity should be cautious in this matter, and when a Jew or a Pagan in their service wishes to become a Christian, there is no power, either by right or subterfuge, to sell him to a Jew after his desire is made public, but the applicant for the Christian faith should receive your protection in every way to secure his liberty. Lest those who lose the slave should think their interests unreasonably injured, your careful consideration is necessary. If they shall have bought Pagans from strangers for profit, and the slaves take refuge in the Church and say they wish to become Christians, or even express the same wish outside the Church, let them be kept three months during which a purchaser may be found, and the owner receive the price from a Christian purchaser. If after the prescribed three months any slave of this kind still asserts his wish,

[1] Ep. iii 38.

and is willing to become a Christian, no one can afterwards buy him, nor can his master under any pretence dare to sell him, but without doubt he continues until he obtains the price of freedom, for he is understood to be reserved not for sale but for the service of his master." [1]

When a Christian slave of a Christian master suffered grievous ill-treatment, he could, by taking refuge in a church, obtain temporary protection until the case could be decided by a judge. Thus the Church was able, in a marked manner, to afford security and provide means of redress. By himself, the slave had little hope of enlisting the law on his side, but if he could escape to a church, the Bishop, as the champion of the distressed, would see that the case was properly inquired into. Abuses sometimes arose from this, and Gregory, who defended the welfare of the slave, was equally zealous for the rights of the master. He thus writes to his agent in Sicily: "We learn that many complain of the loss of their slaves, saying that if a slave runs away from his master and professes to belong to the Church, the rectors of the patrimony forthwith keep him as a slave of the Church without any legal judgement, and uphold the assertion of the slave by force. This is exceedingly displeasing to me, for it is far removed from the dictates of truth. Whence I wish your Experience without any delay to correct what you know has been done, and to restore any such slaves that are now in the power of the Church, and this before any legal decision, since they were taken without legal decision, so that if any among them legally

[1] Ep. vi 32.

belong to the Church, their owners may be summoned by ordinary action." [1] Every church was not open as a refuge for oppressed slaves, for Gregory writes to the agent in Campania: "If any slaves from the city have taken refuge in the monastery of St Severinus or other church of the same citadel, as soon as it comes to your knowledge, do not allow them to remain there, but call them back to the church within the city, and if they have a just complaint against their masters, they must be taken from the church with proper authority. If they have only committed slight faults, put the masters under oath as to the lightness of the fault, and send them back at once." [2]

The wretched condition of the prisoners taken by the Lombards claimed a share in the overflowing charity and care of Gregory, and he exerted himself strenuously for their ransom. He writes to Theoctista, the sister of the Emperor: "Moreover, our beloved son, Sabinianus the Deacon, has brought the thirty gold pounds sent by your Excellency for the ransom of captives and the relief of the poor, and for this I am very pleased, but tremble, for I have to render an account to the terrible Judge, not only for the substance of St Peter, Prince of the Apostles, but also for your goods. Almighty God will return you heavenly things for earthly, eternal for temporal. I may mention that from the city of Cortona in Italy, by the Adriatic, which was captured last year by the Lombards, many men and noble women were taken prisoners; sons were separated from their fathers, parents from their children, and wives from their

[1] Ep. i 36. [2] Ep. iii 1.

husbands, some of whom have been ransomed. But because they say that the price is heavy, many still remain with the fierce Lombards. For their ransom I have remitted half the money that you send. The other half I have disposed of to buy covering for the handmaids of God, whom in Greek you call Monastria, for in the bitter cold of this winter they are almost naked in their beds. They are very numerous in this city, according to the latest information three thousand. They receive, indeed, eighty pounds every year from the patrimony of blessed Peter the Apostle, but what is that among so many, especially in this city, where everything is at a high price? Such is their life, and such their tears and severe mortification, that we believe that if it were not for them, none of us could have lived in this place for so many years amid the swords of the Lombards."[1]

Gregory instructed his agents to be most solicitous over the redemption of captives. He writes to Anthemius: "We cannot tell you how much sorrow fills our hearts for what has happened in Campania, but you can estimate it by the greatness of the calamity. By the bearer, the Magnificent Stephen, we have sent you money for the ransom of captives, admonishing you to be in every way solicitous to set to work actively, and hasten to redeem free men who you know cannot themselves pay their ransom. Do not hesitate to buy slaves whose masters you find are too poor to redeem them. Take care also to redeem the slaves of the Church who have been lost through your negligence. Be particular in taking an exact account of those you ransom, their names, where they live, what

[1] Ep. vii 26.

they do and whence they came, and bring it with you when you come. In this matter lose no time but prove yourself energetic, so that the captives may incur no danger through your negligence, for which afterwards you will be severely reprehended by us. But above all things, when possible, purchase them for a less price; note down the cost accurately and minutely, and send the account to us with all speed."[1]

He allowed and ordered the sacred vessels to be sold for the purpose of ransom: "Although it is reprehensible and worthy of punishment to sell the sacred vessels except when ordered by the law and sacred canons, the disposal of them involves no reproof or penalty when they are sold for the redemption of captives."[2] He severely blames Felix, Bishop of Seponto, for negligence in this: "What you have delayed to do spontaneously at least hasten to do when warned by our exhortation, lest if you neglect, force may compel you to that from which your inclination flies." He orders him to pay a cleric his ransom: "For it is very hard that he who serves the Church should have no assistance."[3] The money once paid for ransom was not reclaimed from the unfortunate victims, and Gregory writes to Demetrianus and Valerianus to assure them "that neither you nor your heirs shall at any time suffer the burden of repayment."[4] He sent a priest to Africa to redeem the prisoners who had been transferred there and sold as slaves, and wrote to the Bishop of Barca ordering him to give every assistance.[5]

These extracts, taken here and there from his own

[1] Ep. vi 35. [2] Ep. vii 13. [3] Ep. iv 17.
[4] Ep. ix 17. [5] Ep. iii 16.

letters, sufficiently explain the nature of Gregory's labours in dealing with the patrimony of the Church. The multitude and diversity of the topics, the minuteness of the details, the care and attention bestowed on each case, the conspicuous prudence and sagacity and the undercurrent of discipline and charity, convey an idea of the activity of his mind. These occupations were carried on in the midst of ecclesiastical affairs, the cares and troubles with the Lombards, the anxieties with the Emperor, with others yet to be mentioned, and at the same time he was unremitting in his writings, his preaching and his prayer.

CHAPTER X

THE MONKS

To the monastic life Gregory attributed the training of his mind and heart, and the happiest days of his life, and on the pontifical throne his tenderest solicitude was bestowed on monks and monasteries. He thoroughly understood the wants, the dangers, the value of the monks; he knew their influence on others, he foresaw their worth to the Church, and he laid the foundation of their future work in the West. He endeavoured to maintain their primitive fervour, to correct rising abuses, to consolidate monastic legislation, and to establish the monks as an acknowledged and integral part of the staff of the Church. In the fifth century monasticism had developed fitfully; isolated monasteries under indefinite rule sprang up independently in different parts. In the six century, St Benedict drew up a simple and comprehensive code or constitution, which through its prudence and discretion gradually absorbed the monasteries of Italy and spread throughout the West. Pope Gregory found St Benedict's rule widely adopted in Italy—it had stood the test of sixty years of trial, and the test had manifested its wisdom and stability. He had mastered it, he had practised it, he had formed his character upon it, and its phrases and idioms had become part of his vocabulary; so that as Pope in dealing with monks and monasteries his letters indicate a thorough acquaintance with monastic principles.

The monasteries suffered much from the Lombards; sometimes their contents were pillaged, sometimes the buildings were destroyed, and the monks dispersed or reduced to great want. The imperial officials in their eagerness to extort money did not spare them; and neighbouring landowners did not always respect the sacredness of monastic property. The undefined position of a monastery as ecclesiastical property, and the uncertain status of monks in the Church polity, induced bishops in many ways to harass them, and to assume power that interfered with the quiet routine of the monastic life. In this state of affairs Gregory saw that the monks needed protection from external annoyance, whether lay or ecclesiastical, security for their buildings and possessions, and a fixed and definite status in the Church scheme. The sixth decree of the Provincial Council, held in 595, regulated the freedom of admission into monasteries after due probation, but in the Council held in Rome in 601, Gregory authoritatively prescribed for the due establishment of the status of the monks, and the document he issued may be called the Magna Charta of the monks, for subsequent enactments followed the lines laid down by the great Pontiff.

"Gregory the Bishop, servant of the servants of God, to all Bishops. The office formerly held by us in the government of a monastery has manifested to us how necessary it is to provide for the quiet of monasteries, and to legislate for their perpetual stability. Inasmuch as we learn that great annoyance and injury has been inflicted upon the monks by those in authority, it behoves your Fraternity to provide by wholesome legislation for their quiet in the

future, so that while engaged in the service of God, they may by the help of his grace persevere in it with undisturbed mind. But lest from custom, which should rather be corrected, anyone should presume to molest the monks, it is necessary, through the zeal of your Fraternity, that the bishops should observe the regulations which are enumerated below, so that by their means no occasion may afterwards be alleged for causing them annoyance. We therefore interdict in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and forbid, by the authority of blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, in whose place we preside over the Church, any bishop or layman by any means in the future to diminish the revenues, property, or securities of monasteries, or cells, or farms which belong to them, or to attempt it by fraud or evasion. If any dispute shall arise within the territory belonging to the churches and the monasteries, which cannot be amicably arranged, it shall be terminated without wilful delay by means of the holy Gospels, before abbots and other God-fearing fathers who shall be chosen for the purpose. At the death of an abbot of any community, a stranger shall not be elected unless the united agreement of the brethren shall choose him of their own free will, and he who is elected shall be consecrated without fraud or bribery. If they have not a competent man amongst themselves they shall carefully seek from another monastery one to be consecrated. Nor let any person under any pretence be placed over a constituted abbot, unless for actual crimes which the Sacred Canons declare should be punished.

"This likewise is to be observed, that henceforth monks shall not be removed to other monasteries, or

raised to sacred orders, or be employed in a clerical office without the consent of the abbot.

"We altogether forbid bishops to make inventories of the ecclesiastical property and securities of a monastery, but when necessary the abbot of the place with other brethren shall make an inventory of the things, and shall arrange all by their consent and judgement. At the death of an abbot the bishop shall never mix himself up in the disposal or settlement of the possessions of the monastery either acquired, given, or to be acquired. We altogether forbid him to celebrate public masses in the monastery, lest occasion be given for any assembly of people in the retreats of the servants of God or their precincts, or for the introduction of women, which is by no means good for their souls, nor shall he dare to place his cathedral seat in a monastery, nor exercise therein any power of any kind, nor make even the slightest regulation unless requested by the abbot of the place, so that the monks may always remain under the power of their abbot, and that no monk without the knowledge and concession of the abbot may be placed in charge of a church or be promoted to any dignity.

"We determine that this our decree shall be kept firm and inviolate in all future time by all bishops, so that by the help of God they shall be content with their churches alone, and shall by no means subject the monasteries to ecclesiastical stipulations or exactions, or any secular service, but let the monks attend to no canonical impositions, so that, freed from the vexations of all burdens, they may continue their daily work with greater devotedness of mind.

"All the Bishops replied: 'We rejoice in the liberty

of the monks, and confirm what your Holiness has decreed about them.' To the document are attached the signatures of twenty-two bishops and sixteen priests."[1]

By this authoritative decree Gregory established the monastic system on a firm and definite basis, he gave the supreme sanction of the Holy See to the status of the monks, he secured the inviolability of their property, the freedom of election of their superiors, their immunity from episcopal control, and their submission to their own superiors only. It was the act of a monk who understood the principles, the nature, and the duties of a monastic life: it was the judgement of a matured mind in response to the training of earlier years; it was the completion of the monastic system. The great patriarch St Benedict consolidated the monastic rule, the great monk-Pope gave it a recognised position in the Church.

The distinction hinted at in the decree between clerical duties and the monastic state is more clearly laid down in several of his letters. He considers that the two cannot in their entirety be fulfilled by one person. He does not forbid monks from undertaking clerical duties, for he employed them himself and encouraged their employment by other bishops, but if they do undertake these duties they ought not to live in the monastery, and cannot be expected to observe the monastic routine. He writes to Maximinian of Syracuse: "Do not allow priests, deacons, or clerics of any other order who serve in the churches to be abbots of monasteries, but let them either relinquish their clerical offices and give themselves up to

[1] Appendix ad Ep. vii.

the monastic life, or, if they determine to remain in the post of abbot, by no means allow them to continue the clerical service. For it is very incongruous when a person cannot properly fulfil one of these duties on account of its importance, that he should be deemed fit for both, and thus mutually the ecclesiastical order hinders the monastic life and the monastic rule hinders ecclesiastical interests."[1]

In communicating the prescriptions of the decree to Marinianus, Bishop of Ravenna, who had himself been a monk of St Andrew's, he continues in explanation, "If the monks should be numerous and sufficient for celebrating the praises of God and for fulfilling the duties of the monastery, the abbot in his zeal may offer those who are superfluous, whom he shall find to be worthy before God. If, although he has sufficient, he is not willing to offer them, the bishop must take any that are superfluous from other monasteries in Ravenna. No one henceforth is to be advanced to ecclesiastical office whom the abbot of the place shall not offer of his own free will. But anyone from the aforesaid monastery who is promoted to ecclesiastical office shall no longer have any power therein, nor be permitted to live in the monastery."[2] "No one," he again writes, "can at the same time undertake ecclesiastical duties and remain properly under monastic rule, so that he is able to observe the discipline of the monastery, and be compelled daily to engage in ecclesiastical ministry. Your Fraternity will hasten to correct this in any place, for I will not on any account suffer the sacred places to be destroyed by the ambition of clerics."[3] In giving permission

[1] Ep. iv 11. [2] Ep. viii 15. [3] Ep. v 1.

for a priest to be ordained in a monastery for the purpose of securing Mass there, he says: "So that neither can he leave the monastery for this reason, nor must a stranger be called in for the sake of saying Mass."[1]

Gregory's intention by these prescriptions was to secure the object of the contemplative life by secluding the monastery from external intrusion. The many duties of the clerical office, the administration of the sacraments, the visitation of the sick, the work of preaching, would introduce into the monastery a variety of cares, sacred indeed in themselves, but which would interfere with that delightful contemplation which he always associated with the monastic enclosure. Hence the abbot or any monk who was fit to undertake clerical duties must leave the walls of the monastery, so as not to interrupt its tranquillity, or encourage the visits or assembly of people in the monastic church. He fully realised that all were not called to a life of contemplation, but he wished to secure to those who were called the undisturbed exercise of their choice. "This is to be mainly considered, that the constitution of minds is very different. Some men have such indolent minds that if they undertake the labour of occupation they succumb at the very beginning of work; and some are so restless that if they have leisure from work they labour more grievously, for they suffer greater tumults of heart the more freely they are left to thought. Hence it is necessary that the quiet mind should not expend itself over the exercise of immoderate labour, nor the restless worry itself over the practice of contemplation. Often those who could contemplate God in quiet, fail

[1] Ep. vi 42.

on account of pressure of occupation; and often those who could fulfil his will when occupied over human purposes, are extinguished by the sword of contemplation."[1]

Acting on these principles, he sedulously watched over the sincerity of those who wished to become monks. He ordered that no one should be finally received into a monastery until after two years of probation. "During this space let their life and conduct be carefully proved, lest any of them shall not be content with what he expected, or when once he is committed does not find what he has chosen. For while it is grievous to employ inexperienced men in secular affairs, who will say how much more grievous it becomes to have untried men attached to the service of God?"[2] This enactment he embodied in the decree of the Council held in 595. For the same purpose he forbad the monasteries in some of the islands to receive any subject under the age of eighteen.[3] To preserve the monasteries from external care, he advises the appointment of a paid secular business agent. "It is according to our desire to remove monks from lawsuits, so that they may piously and diligently attend to the divine ministry. Hence, it is necessary to provide that their affairs may be so arranged that their minds may not engage in various cares of business, and, becoming enervated, grow torpid over their customary work."[4] He often calls attention to the observance of poverty and to mixing up in worldly affairs. He writes to his agent at Ravenna: "Be careful to tell our aforesaid brother and fellow-bishop

[1] *Moral.*, vi 57.
[2] Ep. x 24.
[3] Ep. i 50.
[4] Ep. i 69.

most diligently to repress proprietary[1] in four or five of the monks of the monastery, which heretofore he has by no means corrected, and let him hasten to cleanse the monastery from such a pest; for if proprietary is held by the monks there, neither concord nor charity can exist in the community. For what does the habit of a monk signify unless contempt of the world? How then can they contemn the world who seek after gold in a monastery?"[2]

The same vigour with which he attacked the evils in the dioceses of Italy, he employed to enforce discipline in monasteries, and there are nearly as many letters extant treating of monastic affairs as of episcopal duties. The disturbed state of the country had dispersed many monks who wandered about without fixed abode, others had deserted their cloisters, and some had been expelled for bad behaviour. Gregory ordered his agent in Sicily to seek out the monks that were dispersed by the barbarians and to gather them into a monastery.[3] In Campania he directed his agent not to allow monks to pass from one monastery to another in order to escape the rule of their own abbot, and to use force if necessary to restore them to the monastery of their profession.[4] He forbad bishops to give these wandering monks any countenance but rather to chastise them with due punishment.[5]

Gregory would not suffer an unworthy abbot to remain at the head of a monastery. He deposed an abbot in Campania for sins against chastity.[6] He

[1] The possession of personal property.
[2] Ep. xii 24. [3] Ep. i 41. [4] Ep. i 42.
[5] Ep. vii 35. [6] Ep. iii 23.

ordered the Abbot of Porto Venere in Liguria to be deprived of the use of sacred orders and subjected to a course of penance, at the termination of which he might take the place in the community assigned by the bishop.[1] After due penance he would not allow the offending Abbot to resume charge of the monastery. He writes to the Bishop of Palermo: "No reason will allow the bearer of this, Gregory, Abbot and priest of the monastery of St Theodore, after his almost general fall in his monastery, ever again to preside over it. For he who has led so many disciples to hell by his negligence ought not to be placed over the rest. But since he has for a long time done penance here before us, it is necessary that your Fraternity should receive him again into the aforesaid monastery, but assign him such a position that Urbicus the Praepositus of my monastery may send someone to become his Praepositus, so that what is neglected by the carelessness of the one may be preserved by the solicitude of the other."[2] "The monks of the monastery of the late Abbot Claudius," he writes to his agent at Ravenna, "have petitioned that the monk Constantius may be appointed abbot. But I am very much displeased at their petition, for they seem to me to be themselves worldly minded who seek to have a worldly man as abbot."[3]

He thus exhorts John, Abbot of St. Lucia in Syracuse: "Be thoroughly solicitous about the souls of the brothers. It is sufficient that the reputation of the monastery suffers by your negligence. Do not go abroad frequently. For business appoint a procurator and give yourself to study and prayer.

[1] Ep. v 3. [2] Ep. v 6. [3] Ep. xii 24.

Of the brethren of the monastery whom I see, I do not find that they give themselves to study. Consider then how great a sin it is that God should provide you with support from the offerings of others, and that you should neglect to learn the commands of God."[1] Not only over lax superiors, but over the monks themselves, Gregory exercised constant vigilance. He ordered many visitations; he writes to the monks of Monte Christo: "We have been told that you keep no precepts of the monastic rule, hence we are compelled to send to you the Abbot Horosius, the bearer of this command, to inquire minutely into all your doings, and to order whatever shall appear to him right, and to report to us what he has ordered. We admonish you to show him all obedience and to keep with due reverence what he shall order, as if it were ordered by us."[2] In telling John, Abbot in Reggio, to make a visitation of the monastery of St Andrew in Vulcanus, an island off Sicily, he says: "It is neither becoming nor right for us to pass over what appertains to the correction of religious persons."[3]

Sometimes by the abbots or by visitors, at others by the bishops, or by his agents, Gregory strove to maintain the primitive discipline, and to correct abuses. His *esprit de corps*, his knowledge as a monk, and his companionship with monks, made him cognisant of the circumstances of every monastery in the kingdom. He came into contact with many monks, for he frequently visited St Andrew's on the Coelian, and would seek an interview with any stranger monk. An instance of Gregory's zeal and

[1] Ep. iii 3. [2] Ep. i 51. [3] Ep. v 50.

affection for an individual monk occurs in his letters to Venantius. This unhappy man, who was of good family and position, had renounced his vows, left his monastery, and contracted a marriage. Gregory had evinced an attachment to him whilst in the monastery of St Andrew's, and before he became Pope had evidently made efforts to reclaim him. During the first year of his Pontificate, in the midst of the multitude of public cares that engrossed him, he found time to write the following letter to Venantius: "Many foolishly thought that when I was raised to the Episcopate I should decline to speak or write to you. But it is not so; my very position compels me, and I cannot be silent. For it is written: *Cry out, cease not, raise up your voice as a trumpet.*[1] . . . Urged by these considerations, whether you wish it or not, I shall speak, for with all my strength I wish either to save you or to free myself from the charge of your loss. Remember what habit you have worn, and placing before you the thought of the eternal severity, consider to what you have fallen. Ponder over your fault while there is time, tremble at the strictness of the future judgement while you are able, lest you feel it bitter when you cannot escape it by tears. . . . From the Gospel you know the severe investigation of idle words, and the strict account exacted for useless words. If then in his judgement he condemns for a word, think what will be done for a perverse deed. Ananias vowed money to God, and afterwards by the persuasion of the devil he withdrew it. You know by what death he was punished; if then he deserved this death for taking away from

[1] Isa. xxxviii 1.

God the coins that he had given, think what peril you deserve in the divine judgement who have withdrawn not coin, but yourself from Almighty God, to whom you have vowed yourself in the monastic habit. Hence if you listen to my words of correction for the purpose of heeding them, you will experience how pleasant and sweet they will be in the end. I acknowledge, indeed, that I speak in sorrow, and, stricken with grief at your deed, I am scarcely able to speak at all. And your mind, conscious of its guilt, can scarcely bear what it hears; it blushes, it is confused, it resists. If then you can hardly bear the words of my dust, what will you do in the judgement of your Creator? I acknowledge, however, and this I believe to be the greatest mercy of his heavenly grace, that he sees you flying from life yet still preserves your life, that he sees your pride yet tolerates it, that he yet, through his unworthy servant, administers to you the words of reproof and admonition. So much so that you ought to consider carefully what St Paul says: *And we helping, do exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, In an acceptable time have I heard thee: and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*[1]

"But I know that when my letter is received, friends will forthwith assemble, literary clients will be summoned, and you will seek counsel for a case of life from the abettors of death, who love not you but your goods, who say nothing to you but what will please for the time. Such were the counsellors,

[1] Cor. vi 1, 2.

as you will remember, who led you into the guilt of such a crime. To quote a secular author,[1] all things are to be deliberated with friends, but first deliberate over these friends. If, in your case, you seek a counsellor, choose me, I beseech you, for a counsellor. No one can be more faithful to you in advice; for I love not yours, but you. Almighty God will tell your heart with how much love and endearment my heart embraces you as far as divine grace allows. For I so blame the fault because I love the person, I so love the person that I cannot sanction the viciousness of the fault. If, then, you believe that I love you, come here to the threshold of the Apostles and use me as a counsellor. If, perchance, I am thought to be too prejudiced in favour of the cause of God, and am suspected on account of my zeal, I am ready to take the whole Church into council in the dispute, and whatever all shall agree upon I will in no way oppose, and what is decreed in common I will gladly endorse and carry out. Do what I advise, and may divine grace preserve you."[2]

Venantius paid no heed to this urgent appeal, yet Gregory persisted in trying to reclaim his erring brother, for he several times wrote to him. Ten years later, when Venantius was at the point of death, he begged John, Bishop of Syracuse, to press his good offices during the last illness. "Your Holiness, therefore, ought to neglect no possible means to induce him to think of his soul by exhorting, by beseeching, by proposing the terrible judgement of God, by promising his unspeakable mercy, in order that he may return to his monastic habit even at the

[1] Seneca. [2] Ep. i 34.

last, lest the guilt of so heinous a fault stand against him in the eternal judgement. Afterwards, you ought to consider how his daughters, Barbara and Antonina, should be provided for so as not to give occasion to the talk of wicked men."[1] He offered consolation to the two daughters on the imminent death of their father: "Since we should never despair of the mercy of our Redeemer, brace up your minds for the comfort of your father and place your hope in the hand of Almighty God; we trust in his protection that he may preserve you in adversity, lighten your tribulation, and grant you to be suitably settled according to your father's desire."[2] After the death of Venantius he writes again to them an affectionate letter, and offers them a genial welcome to Rome.[3] The persistence with which Gregory urged his solicitude on behalf of his friend's soul, and the tenderness with which he befriended his orphan daughters, show the faithfulness with which Gregory clung to his friends.

The great Pontiff was equally solicitous over the discipline and prosperity of monasteries for women. In these no particular rule was adopted, but pious women assembled together to undertake a traditional mode of life, to which they bound themselves by vow. Some engaged in external works of charity, others remained entirely within the walls of their convent. In order to prevent any interruption or disturbance of their ascetic routine through necessary external business, Gregory ordered for each convent an agent who should manage external transactions in their name. "Now this is so thoroughly

[1] Ep. xi 36. [2] Ep. xi 35. [3] Ep. xi 78.

neglected," he writes to the Bishop of Cagliari, "that the virgins themselves, who are entirely dedicated to God, are compelled to attend before official persons for tributes and other burdens, and are obliged to go through villages and farms to pay taxes, and mix themselves up in business suitable for men. Which evil your Fraternity will remove by gentle correction, and carefully depute a man of approved life and conduct, whose age and position will give no ground for unworthy suspicion, who in the fear of God can help these convents, so that for public or private business they may not after this be wandering outside their cloister against rule."[1] He also begs him to remove to convents of stricter observance any who may still show an inclination to leave the precincts of their own.

He calls the attention of the Bishop of Palermo to some irregularities. "Moreover I hear that the nun Martia has been illegally removed from the convent of St Martin to another convent, and Victoria, who took her place, has disposed of the goods of the convent in order that she might obtain the position of prioress and take her place after the abbess. Your Fraternity will with all speed correct this, for you know who is in fault, so that, situated so far off, I may, through you, know what takes place in your city, and so in the midst of many occupations I may determine what should be done. We wish the aforesaid Martia to be recalled to her convent and position. Send Victoria to our defensor Fantinus, so that he may examine her and find out to whom she has given the goods of the convent. We wish the examination to take place in another convent, and a full report to

[1] Ep. iv 9.

be sent to us by the defensor Fantinus, so that we may know what judgement to pronounce about her. I hear that much evil has happened to the same convent through the physician Anastasius. If he shall have entered this or any other monastery of virgins, the fault regards your Fraternity, who has charge of the flock committed to you, and who pretends to preserve it."[1]

To free the nuns from anxiety about worldly affairs Gregory insisted that they should have sufficient means to support them. In ordering his agent, Sabinianus, to make over an estate to the convent in Euprepia, he writes: "We are impelled by the duty of piety to make provident consideration for convents, lest those who are known to be set aside for the service of God should, which God avert, suffer any want."[2] Before the dedication of a convent he arranged for due support, and the items that he prescribed must be judged by the circumstances of the time. He gives permission to the Bishop of Luna to consecrate the chapel of a convent: "Therefore, dearest brother, you will solemnly consecrate without public masses the oratory of the aforesaid convent, provided that it is clear that no corpse has been buried there, and that your Fraternity makes the legitimate donation—namely, a silver chalice weighing six ounces, a silver paten weighing two pounds, two cloths and one covering for the altar, ten beds, twenty sets of brass utensils, and thirty sets of iron utensils, for land the Faborian farm, and Lumbricata, situated entirely in the territory of Luna about the second milestone from the city by the River Macra, two

[1] Ep. v 6. [2] Ep. ii 4.

slaves Maurus and John, and two pairs of oxen, with everything conveyed and secured by municipal deed, and the rest according to custom."[1] So also to Decius, Bishop of Lilybaeum, to the same purpose: "Therefore, dearest brother, since the above edifice is in your city, consecrate it if it is evident that no corpse has been buried there, and you have received the legitimate endowment, that is, ten *solidi* of revenue free from fiscal tribute, three slaves, three pairs of oxen, five other slaves to serve in the monastery, ten horses, ten cows, four plants for vines, forty sheep, and the rest according to custom."[2]

He deals with a curious case of the will of an abbess,[3] which was alleged to be valid, on the ground that during her term of office she had not worn the religious habit, and his letter to the Bishop of Cagliari is an interesting example of the care he bestowed on such cases: "It is declared by a clear definition of the law, that those who enter a monastery for the purpose of conversion have no longer the right of making a will, but that all their goods belong to the monastery. It is generally known that, to our great surprise, a complaint has reached us from Gavinia, the Abbess of the Convent of SS Gavinus and Luxorius, in which she asserts that Serica, the Abbess of her monastery, after she had undertaken the government, bequeathed legacies to some people by will. When we asked the solicitude of your Holiness how it happened that things belonging to a monastery had been detained by others, our common

[1] Ep. viii 4. [2] Ep. x 66.

[3] By the vow of poverty at profession, a monk or nun was unable to possess anything, and hence could not legally make a will.

son your archpriest Epiphanius replied, that the aforesaid Abbess up to the day of her death was unwilling to be clothed in the monastic dress, but had worn the clothes which in that place women attached to the Presbytery were accustomed to wear. To this the aforesaid Gavinia answered, that this was lawful by custom, for she alleged that the Abbess who preceded Serica had worn such dress. When, therefore, we began to wrangle in no slight manner about the quality of the clothes, it seemed advisable to ask our own counsellors and other learned men of this city what was the law on the point. They gave their opinion, that after an abbess was consecrated with solemnities by a bishop, and had presided over the government of her monastery for many years until her death, the quality of the dress would pertain to the bishop who allowed it, and could not be urged to the prejudice of the monastery, but that the property manifestly belonged by law to the place where she had entered and had become abbess. Amongst the property unlawfully bequeathed she asserts that a hospice is unduly retained, and since both monastery and hospice are situated in your city, we urge you by this letter to provide for the case with all care. If possession is held by no previous contract, but comes from the legacy of the aforesaid Serica, it should be restored to the monastery without commotion or excuse. But if it is said to arise from another contract, either your Fraternity, after ascertaining the truth, will decide between the parties what legal right shall dictate, or let them mutually choose arbitrators who may elucidate these allegations. Whatever shall be decided let it be enforced

under your supervision, so that no wrangling may continue in religious places, but what most conduces to concord and peace. All other things which are detained under the will of the aforesaid Serica, for which there is no legal sanction, should be restored to the monastery through the priestly solicitude of your Fraternity, for it is clearly laid down in the imperial constitution that what is done against the law is to be considered not merely null but as if never done."[1]

Gregory strongly insisted that abbesses should be of mature age. "We most strenuously forbid young abbesses to be consecrated. Your Fraternity will allow no bishop to consecrate a virgin under sixty, whose age and conduct shall have justified it."[2]

Thus in many different ways the great Pontiff watched over the discipline and security of the inmates of convents. Nor was he less urgent in securing liberty to women to enter religion: "Felix the defensor is said to have a girl named Catella, who with many tears and vehement desire longs for the religious habit, which her master will by no means allow her. We direct you to go to the aforesaid Felix, and carefully examine into the dispositions of the girl, and if this proves correct, give the price of the girl to her master, and by God's help send her here under the charge of staid persons to be placed in a monastery. So do this that the soul of the girl may not suffer harm by any dilatory action."[3]

Solicitude for the discipline and spiritual welfare of the monasteries did not diminish Gregory's interest in their material prosperity and multiplication. He had originally converted his own patrimony into

[1] Ep. ix 7. [2] Ep. iv 11. [3] Ep. iii 40.

monasteries, and as Supreme Pontiff he everywhere promoted their foundation. He set aside a portion of the Church patrimony for the erection of new monasteries in Italy and the islands and facilitated their establishment by others, writing many letters of praise and encouragement to those who devoted their means to an object so dear to his heart. To the poorer monasteries he sent help either in generous donations or as an annual subsidy.[1] When the Lombards nearly extinguished a monastery or reduced its brethren to extreme poverty, he united it to a more flourishing one and amalgamated the communities.[2] He frequently prohibited bishops from molesting monasteries, ordered them to restore goods unjustly taken by themselves, and commissioned them and his agent to recover goods taken by others.[3]

He placed several existing churches under the charge of the monks. In the city of Rome itself he made over to them the church of St Pancras: "We have learnt that the church of St Pancras is frequently neglected, so that people coming on Sunday to hear Mass, finding no priest, go away murmuring. After mature deliberation we have determined to remove the priests, and by the grace of God to establish a community of monks in a monastery adjoining the church, so that the Abbot who presides over it may devote all care and attention to the aforesaid church. Over this monastery we appoint you, Maurus, to be the Abbot, decreeing that the lands of the aforesaid church, or whatever shall accrue from its revenue, shall be applied to your monastery, and shall belong

[1] Ep. i 24; ii 1; xii 45. [2] Ep. xi 72; xiii 2.
[3] Ep. v 28; vi 29, 40; viii 15, 18, 34; x 22.

to it without any deduction, and hence, clearly, whatever is to be done or repaired in the above church shall without doubt be repaired by you. Lest when the priests to whom the church has been committed are removed, the services should cease, we order you by the tenor of this authority always to engage a strange priest to celebrate there the solemnities of the Mass. He must dwell in your monastery, and thus have the means of support."[1] He also placed under their charge a celebrated and sumptuous basilica built by Justinian at Classe, near Ravenna, upon the site chosen by Augustus as a port for his fleet in the Adriatic, and endowed it with privileges and exemptions to the displeasure of his friend the Bishop of Ravenna.[2]

Nor did he confine his attention to the monasteries of Italy. On receiving the report of St Augustine, he congratulated Stephen, Abbot of Lerins in Gaul, on the concord in his community, and exhorted him to vigilance over discipline.[3] In a letter to Conon, the next Abbot of Lerins, he details the duties of a religious superior, and thus neatly expresses the method of correction: "Let the good feel that you are kind, the perverse that you correct. In correction follow this order, love the person and avenge the fault, lest if you strive to do otherwise, correction pass into cruelty, and you lose those whom you seek to amend. For you would thus trim a wound, so as not to ulcerate what is sound, lest if you press in the knife beyond what is necessary, you injure him you hasten to benefit. Let your kindness be wary and not remiss, your correction careful and assiduous, not

[1] Ep. iv 18. [2] Ep. vi 29. [3] Ep. vi 56.

severe. Let the one so season the other that the good may have something to fear while loving, and the bad something to love while fearing."[1] He praises Queen Brunehalt for erecting monasteries in Gaul, and confers privileges upon them.[2] He confirms the privileges granted by Pope Vigilius to the monastery at Arles,[3] and grants fresh ones to a convent at Marseilles,[4] and to monasteries in Autun.[5] He tells the Bishop of Vienne not to hinder Pancras, a deacon, from entering monastic life.[6] He orders his defensor to inquire into the doings in a monastery in the island of Caprica, off Majorca.[7] He writes to Dominic, Bishop of Carthage, to beg his intervention to help the Abbot Cumquodeus in restraining his monks from wandering from the monastery.[8]

In the east, Gregory defended the monks of Isauria in a long contest against the Patriarch of Constantinople, and in sending a subsidy to the Abbot Elias in Isauria, he humorously meets the modesty of the request by corresponding liberality: "You ask for fifty *solidi* to be sent to you for the wants of the monastery, but thinking this too much you have given us back ten, so that we should send only forty, and lest even this should be burdensome, you are willing to return still more to us. But because we find that you are very merciful to our charity, we shall reply to your mercy in a similar way. We have sent fifty, and lest this should be too little we have added another ten; and again in case this should still be too

[1] Ep. xi 12. [2] Ep. xiii 6. [3] Ep. ix 3.
[4] Ep. vii 12. [5] Ep. xiii 8, 9, 10.
[6] Ep. xii 35. [7] Ep. xiii 46. [8] Ep. vii 35.

little we have added to it another twelve."[1] He sent beds and bedding to the monastery on Mount Sinai for the use of pilgrims, and the Pontiff in the Lateran thus asks the recluse in the desert of Mount Sinai to pray for him: "You who spend a tranquil life in the great peacefulness of your contemplation, and rest securely on the shore, stretch out the hand of prayer to us who are ploughing the deep, or rather being shipwrecked, and by your supplications help, as far as you can, us who are striving to reach the land of the living, so that you may have eternal reward not only for your own life but for our danger."[2] He sent a colony of monks from his own monastery of St Andrew to found a hospital in Jerusalem, and appointed Probus their Abbot, thereby carrying the rule of St Benedict to the Holy Sepulchre.[3]

Thus Gregory's eye ceaselessly roamed over monastery and convent, over superior and community, over discipline and temporalities, his hand ever ready to correct, his mind ever ready to guide, his heart ever ready to encourage and to soothe, to console and to assist. His care for monasteries was a labour of love, the overflow of a full heart. The sad wistful longing for the monastic rest pervades his letters, his unflagging occupations, and his prayers. His one relaxation, his one consolation, was the society of the monks round him in the Lateran, his one pleasure was to escape to a little oratory behind the chapel of our Lady in the church in his own monastery on the Coelian, and to spend a few days unknown and un-

[1] Ep. v 38. [2] Ep. xi 1.
[2] *John the Deacon*, ii 52.

noticed in reading and meditation. If his heart took satisfaction in any of his works, it must have had full gratification in being able to provide so many with a monastic home, to hedge in their retirement, to protect them from interruption and distraction, to minister to their needs, to spread the monastic spirit, and to establish the monastic system firmly in the Church.

CHAPTER XI

THE EASTERN BISHOPS

The Roman Pontiffs communicated with the Eastern Church chiefly through the Patriarchs, and only in cases of ultimate appeal, or in questions of faith, did the Pope come into contact with the ordinary Sees of the East. Matters of discipline, election of bishops, and general ecclesiastical causes, appertained to the jurisdiction of the respective Patriarchs. The influence of the Emperor, and the pliant subserviency of the eastern mind, prompted the bishops to strive for the favour and concurrence of the Emperor, rather than to seek redress at Rome, and the causes that afterwards separated the eastern and western churches smouldered under the surface for centuries. Constantinople had asserted the position of a new Rome in the political world, and was restless in its secondary place in the ecclesiastical world.

Gregory had studied the state of affairs in the east during his six years' sojourn in the imperial city, and had ample reason for anxiety in dealing with the eastern Church, so as to avoid collision with the Emperor, or giving unnecessary offence to the bishops, while upholding principle and discipline. In 592, he defended a suffragan bishop from an unjust sentence of both Metropolitan and Primate, and with customary love of discipline punished them for the injustice. Adrian, Bishop of Thebes, had deposed

two of his deacons, one for immorality and the other for embezzlement. The deacons hurried off to Constantinople, appealed to the Emperor, and in support of their case entered countercharges against Adrian, whom they accused of neglecting to depose Stephen —another deacon of infamous life—and of prohibiting the baptism of infants, thereby depriving them of salvation in case of death. The Emperor referred the matter to the Metropolitan, John, Bishop of Larissa. The witnesses succeeded in establishing the bad life of Stephen, but could not prove that Adrian had any knowledge of it. They produced no evidence of a prohibition of infant baptism, but merely the reports of some mothers whose husbands had been punished by the bishop, whereas there was direct proof that children had been baptised at Demetrias. In spite of the evidence the Bishop of Larissa condemned Adrian, who forthwith appealed to the Emperor, but notwithstanding his appeal was cast into prison, and while in durance was constrained to sign a document admitting his guilt.

Adrian persisted in his appeal, and included in it the proceedings of the Bishop of Larissa. The Emperor appointed a commission, consisting of the Nuncio Honoratus and a Secretary Sebastian, to investigate the cause, and by their decision Adrian was acquitted. By some means, Gregory says "he knows not by whose machinations,"[1] the Emperor was induced to issue a new decree ordering the Primate, John, Bishop of Prima Justiniana, to re-open the whole case. The Primate without further evidence condemned Adrian and deposed him. Adrian

[1] Ep. iii 7.

appealed to the Pope against the injustice that he had suffered from his Metropolitan and his Primate. Gregory waited a long time for the appearance of their delegates, and then investigated both sentences and pronounced them irregular in form and unjust in fact. He acquitted and reinstated Adrian and wrote a severe letter to the Primate: "In the present case we have first quashed your decrees and rendered your sentence null, and now by the authority of blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, we order that you be deprived of holy communion for the space of thirty days, and that with the greatest penitence and sorrow you ask pardon from our Almighty God for such excess. If we learn that you have been remiss in fulfilling this our sentence, take notice that we shall by the help of the Lord more severely punish not only the injustice but the contumacy of your Fraternity."[1] He treated the Metropolitan more leniently, administering a stern reprimand and removing Adrian from his jurisdiction.[2] He also despatched a deacon to the province to enquire into the state of feeling excited by the proceedings, and to use his good offices in establishing concord and charity amongst the bishops.[3]

A controversy arose with the Patriarch of Constantinople concerning two priests—John, from Chalcedon, and Athanasius, a monk of Isauria—who were accused of heresy. While the cases were pending before John the Faster, one of the monks of Isauria was publicly beaten in the church at Constantinople. Gregory demanded an explanation from the Patriarch, who after much delay answered that he did not know

[1] Ep. iii 6. [2] Ep. iii 7. [3] Ep. iii 39.

what was alluded to. Gregory wrote to him with a spice of irony: "I am completely astonished at this reply, and have quietly turned over in my mind whether, supposing it to be true, anything could be worse than that an affair of this kind should happen to the servants of God, and he who is close at hand should know nothing of it. For what excuse can there be for a pastor if when the wolf has devoured his flock he knows nothing about it? But if your Holiness knew what I wrote about, and what was done to John the priest, or Athanasius the monk and priest of Isauria, and has written to me, 'I do not know,' against this I can only answer what Truth says in the Scripture: *The mouth that belieth killeth the soul.*[1] I ask you, most holy brother, has your so great abstinence[2] reached such a pitch that you wish to hide what is done to a brother by denying it? Would it not be better that flesh meat should enter into that mouth than that false speech should come out of it to deceive your neighbour? Especially when Truth says: *Not that which goeth into a man defileth a man: but what cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*[3] But enough of this, lest I come to believe any such things against your most holy heart.

"This letter is signed with your signature, but I do not think it was your own. I had written to the most blessed man the lord John, but I think that a young man, your familiar, has answered me, who has learnt nothing as yet about God, who knows not the

[1] Wisd. i 2.
[2] An allusion to his title of John the Faster and his austerity.
[3] Matt. xv 11.

bowels of charity, whom all accuse of iniquity, who every day schemes for the death of many in secret, who neither trembles before God nor blushes before man. Believe me, most holy brother, if you have proper zeal for truth, you will correct him, so that those who are near you, and even those who are not near you, may be the more easily amended by example. Do not give heed to his tongue: he should be amenable to the counsel of your Holiness, and not your Holiness be swayed by his words. If you listen to him I know that you cannot have peace with your brethren. By my conscience I avow that I seek a quarrel with no man, and would do my utmost to avoid it; and, although I greatly desire to be at peace with all men, I desire it especially with you, whom I devotedly love, if you really are the one whom I knew of old. For if you keep not the canons and strive to upset the statutes of the Fathers, I do not know who you are. Act, therefore, most holy and dear brother, so that we may mutually recognise each other, lest the old enemy induce us two to quarrel, and by his wicked victory cause injury to many. For I freely admit that, not standing on dignity, if the young man of whom I spoke had not attained such a height of depravity with your Fraternity, I should have been silent about what the canons suggested to me, and I should have at once with confidence sent back those who came to me, knowing that your Holiness would have received them with charity. But even now I say, either restore these persons to their positions and let them have peace, or, if you will not do this, bring the cause to an issue by the canons and the statutes of

the Fathers. If you will do neither, we do not wish to force a quarrel, and shall not refuse to see anyone that you send to us. Your Fraternity well knows what the canons say about bishops who seek to be feared by means of stripes. We are pastors, not persecutors. The illustrious preacher says: *Reprove, entreat, rebuke, with all patience and doctrine.*[1] It is a new and unheard-of method of preaching to exact faith by stripes."[2]

Ultimately the Patriarch sent delegates to Rome, and the cases were submitted to the council held in 595. Athanasius was a priest of the monastery of Tamnac in Lycaonia, and was accused of speaking against the Council of Ephesus, and of holding heretical doctrines. Gregory mentions him in the *Dialogues*[3] as a person who, with an external display of great austerity, secretly indulged in the pleasures of the table, and who came to a bad end. The delegates produced a copy of the acts of the Council of Ephesus, and a book containing heresy, which was found in the cell of Athanasius. Gregory examined the book and discovered Manichaeism in it, but he also found that the person who affixed notes for the purpose of pointing out the heresy had himself fallen into the errors of Pelagius. The copy of the acts of the Council of Ephesus did not correspond with that in Rome, and Gregory sent to Ravenna for an ancient copy, which demonstrated that the passages which had been contravened were really heretical. Gregory explained all this to the delegates from Constantinople, and satisfied them. He wrote a letter to Athanasius, in which he notices the

[1] 2 Tim. iv 2. [2] Ep. iii 53. [3] *Dial.*, iv 38.

errors in the book, but since the accused had freely made a profession of his faith and accepted the doctrines of the five councils, he declared him free of the charge of heresy, and reinstated him in his monastery and position.[1]

John, a priest of Chalcedon, was accused of the heresy of the Marcianists. The Patriarch of Constantinople appointed judges to hear the case, his accusers could not produce any evidence, John made a profession of faith, but notwithstanding this the judges condemned him. He appealed to the Holy See, and after examining the whole process Gregory submitted it to the Council, and acquitted him. He wrote to the Patriarch: "We are much astonished that the judges appointed by you to investigate the faith of John, priest of the Church of Chalcedon, neglecting the truth, should have given credit to rumour, and would not believe what he distinctly professed. Moreover, that while his accusers strove to convict him of the heresy of the Marcianists, as they alleged, when asked what it was, replied openly that they did not know. Hence it is evident that they only wished to afflict his person unjustly without respect of God, and to the detriment of their own souls. Therefore, after thoroughly examining and investigating all that was necessary at a council, as the tenor of our acts manifests, we find that the aforesaid priest is guilty of nothing, chiefly because the articles produced by the judges delegated by you are completely in accord with the true faith; hence condemning the sentence of the aforesaid judges, we have declared that he is a Catholic, and by the grace of

[1] Ep. vi 66.

Christ our Redeemer free from all crime of heresy."[1] He also wrote to the Emperor and Empress to tell them the result of the investigation, and to ask their protection in favour of the persecuted priest.[2] It is interesting to note that the exercise of supreme authority by the Holy See in these two appeals, which was accepted by the Patriarch, took place during the celebrated controversy about the assumption of the title of ecumenical bishop by the Patriarch of Constantinople.

This controversy, into which Gregory entered with considerable warmth, had its origin before his time. The term ecumenical has been assigned to the great councils: it means universal, and when applied to the councils it signified that bishops were summoned to the council from all parts of the world, and that the whole Catholic episcopate accepted its acts. To apply the term to a bishop implied universal jurisdiction and excluded other bishops, or made them delegates; if assigned to a patriarch, it would place the other patriarchs under his jurisdiction, and make him the patriarch of the world. The title was offered to Pope Leo I at the Council of Chalcedon, and declined by him.[3] On the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople, the Emperors intended that the imperial city should become a new Rome. In civil power the Byzantine city was supreme, and as a counterpoise to the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff in ecclesiastical matters, servile courtiers ingeniously glossed over the subordinate position of the Church of Constantinople with sounding titles. The Emperor, indirectly flattered by prominence

[1] Ep. vi 15. [2] Ep. vi 16, 17. [3] Ep. v 20.

given to the imperial see, and gratified at having its bishop within his personal influence, encouraged the importance given to the Church of Constantinople. Originally it was subject to the Metropolitan at Heraclea; it then became a Metropolitan Church itself over Heraclea and others, and later assumed the Patriarchate. Through the subservience of the bishops in their efforts to catch the smile of the Emperor, the Patriarch of Constantinople was allowed to take a position next to the Pope at the Councils of Constantinople and Chalcedon. After the refusal of the title of ecumenical bishop by St Leo at the Council of Chalcedon, some of the court flatterers applied it to the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Emperors Leo and Justinian confirmed its adoption, and a Synod held in 588 formally conferred it on John the Faster, against which Pope Pelagius protested at the time.

The first official intimation of the assumption of the title came to Gregory in a letter from John, enclosing the acts of a judgement against a priest accused of heresy, in every second line of which the title was ostentatiously inserted. The Emperor also wrote to Gregory on the subject, advising that he should remain at peace with the Patriarch. Silence would tacitly acknowledge the title, so Gregory wrote to John, the Emperor, the Empress, and to his Nuncio. He says to the last: "I was unwilling to write two letters to our brother John, the most reverend Bishop of Constantinople. Hence I have only written one, in which there is a mixture both of principle and pleasantness. You will take care, my beloved, to deliver the letter that I have addressed to him accord-

ing to the wish of the Emperor. Later another shall be sent in which his pride shall not rejoice. . . . I wonder how he could so deceive you that you allowed the Lord Emperor to send me a letter in which he warns me to keep peace with him. If he wishes to be just he should warn him to refrain from the proud title, and then there would be peace between us. I suspect you have little idea of the cunning in which our aforesaid brother John has acted. He has so managed that either the Emperor should be heard on his side and thereby seem to confirm his vanity, or that he should be disregarded by me, and thus have his mind irritated against me. But we shall pursue a straight path, fearing nothing in this case but Almighty God. Wherefore, beloved, do not fear. . . . After we have been defenceless against the sword of the enemy, after we have lost silver, gold, slaves, clothes for the sake of the Republic, it is too ignominious to lose the faith also, for admitting this shameful title is nothing less than losing the faith."[1]

The letter to the Patriarch at the Emperor's request is firm yet peaceful. Gregory refers to John's election at which time he intended to escape in order to avoid the dignity. "You who confessed yourself unworthy to be even called a bishop, have brought yourself to this pass, that, despising your brethren, you seek to be called the only bishop." He mentions that Pope Pelagius had written to him, had annulled the acts of the council that conferred the title, and had forbidden the Nuncio to celebrate Mass with him. He refers to his own request not to use the title, which he had made through delegates and

[1] Ep. v 19.

his Nuncio. "And since wounds that are to be operated on should first be touched with a gentle hand, I ask, I beseech, I entreat your Fraternity with all the kindness I can, to contradict those who flatter you with a term of error, and to refuse to consent to be addressed by a foolish and proud title. With grief I say it, and I attribute it to my own sins with the greatest sorrow of heart, that my brother has not yet acquired humility, who has received the episcopate in order to lead the souls of others to humility, that he who teaches others truth does not consent to teach himself even at my entreaty." He explains the tendency of the title to disturb the peace of the Church, to invade the rights of other bishops, and to foster pride. He cautions him against flatterers: "They are deemed to be the greatest enemies who are most lavish with praises. Leave such; if they are to deceive at all, let them deceive worldly men and not the heart of priests." He notes the evils of pride and the blessings of humility, instancing the humility of our Lord in the Incarnation: "What can we say of a bishop who receives the position of honour from the humility of our Redeemer, and who imitates the pride of his enemy?" He quotes our Lord's precepts as to the order of fraternal correction, and continues: "I have endeavoured once or twice through my delegates to correct by humble words; now I write myself. Whatever I ought humbly to do I have not neglected. But if I am contemned in my correction, it remains for me to call in the Church. In saying this Almighty God will teach your Fraternity with how much love I am drawn towards you, and how in this matter I grieve not against you but for you.

But I cannot prefer any person, not even he whom I love much, before the Gospel precepts, the institutes of the canons, and the welfare of the brethren."[1]

To the Emperor, Gregory writes commending his desire to obtain peace amongst the clergy, and eloquently depicts the evils of pride in bishops: "As far as I am able I have yielded obedience to your most Serene commands, but the cause is not mine, it is that of God; not I alone but the whole Church is disturbed, the sacred laws, the venerable synods, the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ are disturbed by the invention of a proud and pompous title." He quotes the passages of Scripture that speak of the primacy of Peter: "Behold he has received the keys of the heavenly Kingdom, power of binding and loosing is given to him, the care of the whole Church and the primacy is committed to him, but he is not called universal Apostle, and yet our most holy fellow priest John strives to be called universal bishop. I am compelled to exclaim and to cry out, *O tempora! O mores!*

"Behold Europe is in the power of barbarians, cities are destroyed, camps demolished, provinces depopulated, lands untilled, the worshippers of idols daily harass and prevail to the destruction of the faithful, yet priests who ought to lie prostrate on the ground in tears and ashes, seek for themselves titles of vanity and glory in new and profane phrases.

"In this, most Pious Lord, do I defend my own cause? Do I vindicate a personal injury? Is it not the cause of Almighty God, the cause of the universal Church? Who is this that presumes to usurp for

[1] Ep. v 18.

himself a new name against the gospel precepts, against the decrees of the canons?" He then enumerated the different heresies that had their origin at Constantinople, in order to show what would result from the pre-eminence of that Church. "The commands of the most Pious Lords should rather restrain him who refuses obedience to canonical precepts. He should be coerced who inflicts an injury on the whole Church, who dilates his heart, who seeks pleasure in an exclusive name, who by a term not allowed by the State exalts himself above even your imperial dignity. Let the author of the scandal return to a right life, and all disagreement amongst priests will cease. . . . In obedience to the commands of my Lords I have written gently to my fellow priest aforesaid, and have humbly admonished him to amend this craving for empty glory. If he is willing to hear me he will find a devoted brother, but if he persists in his pride I foresee already what will follow—that he will find a powerful adversary of whom it is written: *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*"[1]

Gregory endeavoured to gain the interest of the Empress by a letter couched in somewhat similar terms.[2] In this vigorous action Gregory did not contend against the mere title; in reproving the pride of John he had in view the exaltation of the Church of Constantinople. He pronounced it a question of faith, of the peace and concord of the whole Church, and of the dignity and jurisdiction of the whole episcopate. The establishment of the title would become an attack on the primacy and pre-

[1] James iv 6; Ep. v 20. [2] Ep. v 21.

eminence of Peter and the Roman See, and later a stepping-stone to the domination of the Church by the imperial sceptre. Hence the earnestness with which Gregory took up and prosecuted the controversy. It was desirable to obtain the concurrence and assistance of the other Patriarchs, and he despatched a joint letter to Anastasius of Antioch and Eulogius of Alexandria, in which he explained the bearings of the question on bishops in general and on the other patriarchs. He continues: "Almighty God will indicate to your Holiness how much I suffer in grieving over the thought, that he who was formerly so unassuming to me, that he who was beloved by all, that he who was occupied in alms, prayer and fasting, has fallen from the ashes on which he sat, from the humility that he preached, so that he strives to attribute all things to himself, and by setting up a pompous title, desires to subjugate to himself all the members of Christ that are united alone to the one head which is Christ. . . . Wherefore we must pray and implore Almighty God to divert the error from his mind, and to remove this evil of pride and confusion from the unity and humility of the Church. By the help of the Lord we must take counsel, and provide lest the living members of the body of Christ perish by the poison of one word. For, if it is lawful to say it, when the dignity of all the Patriarchs is abolished, and he who is called Universal himself perishes in error, no bishop may be found to have remained in the truth.

"Preserve therefore your churches continuous and intact as you have received them, let not the temptation of diabolical usurpation prevail with you

in the least. Stand courageous, stand firm, do not ever presume to give or receive any documents that contain the falsity of this term universal. Prohibit all the bishops subject to your care from the pollution of this pride, so that the whole Church may recognise you as Patriarchs, not only by your good works but by the authority of truth. If perchance any affliction follow, continuing united, we ought to show even by our death that we do not prefer our personal interest to the common good. Let us say with Paul: *For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.*[1] Let us listen to what the first of all pastors said: *But if ye also suffer anything for justice sake, blessed are ye.*[2] Believe me if the necessity arose, rather than retain the dignity I have received for preaching the truth, I would sooner lay it down for the sake of the same truth. Pray for me, as becomes your dearest Holiness, that I may prove by deeds what I thus dare to say."[3]

From the last words of this letter Gregory seems to have apprehended some serious trouble. Anastasius of Antioch thought that the controversy regarded epithets rather than any real danger, and probably reproved the Pontiff for excess of zeal, for Gregory's reply illustrates his humility in receiving rebuke: "I have received your welcome letter, dearest beloved, brought by our common son Sabinian the deacon, in which the words flow not from the tongue but from the soul. I am not surprised that he who lives well should speak well. For you have learnt the precepts of life from a master of the spirit in the school of the heart, to despise all earthly things

[1] Phil. i 24. [2] 1 Peter iii 14. [3] Ep. v 43.

and to press on to the heavenly country. As you advance in good yourself so you suppose good in others. Although in the letter of your Holiness I find much that is said in my favour, I detect the wish to call to mind not what I am but what I ought to be. That which you tell me of my character ought to be fixed in my mind, so as to give no occasion to the malignant spirit who seeks to devour souls. I always recollect my bad ways, and do my best as far as I can to overcome and get rid of my faults. If, however, you think that I have done any good, I trust through the help of Almighty God that I am not ungrateful. But your Holiness in commencing with words of sweetness wishes your letter, by its subsequent phrases, to be like a bee that carries a sting as well as honey, so that it may please me with the honey and prick me with its sting. But to this I reply in the words of Solomon: *Better are the wounds of a friend than the deceitful kisses of an enemy.*[1] . . . But you ought not to have said that the same cause was of no importance, for if we endure this calmly we corrupt the faith of the whole Church. You know how many, not only heretics, but heresiarchs, have come out of the Church of Constantinople. To say nothing of the injury to your office, if one bishop is called universal the whole Church collapses when the universal one falls. But away with this foolishness, this levity from my ears. I trust in the Almighty God that what he promised will quickly be fulfilled: *He that exalteth himself shall be humbled.*"[2]

Eulogius of Alexandria, after some delay of which

[1] Prov. xxvii 6. [2] Ep. vii 27.

Gregory reminded him,[1] sent a letter in which he styles Gregory universal Pope, and in repudiating this the humble Pontiff frees himself from any suspicion of self-seeking in the contest about the title. "Your Holiness notifies that you have not addressed anyone with the titles of pride which has sprung from the root of vanity, and speaking to me say, 'as you ordered.' Do not, I ask you, let me hear that word order, for I know who I am and who you are. You are brothers to me in position, fathers in conduct. I have not ordered, but I have endeavoured to point out what seems useful. I do not find that your Holiness has accurately retained in your memory what I proposed. For I said that you ought not to address such title to me or to anyone else, and behold in the beginning of your letter you have taken care to express the very thing I forbid, calling me universal Pope, an appellation of pride. I ask your gentlest Holiness not to do this any more, for that is taken from you which is unreasonably given to another. I do not seek to be gratified by words, but by conduct. Nor do I deem that an honour which I know takes honour from my brethren. My honour is the honour of the whole Church. My honour is the solid strength of my brethren. Then am I truly honoured when the honour due to each one is not withheld. For if your Holiness calls me universal Pope, you deny to yourself the thing about which you call me universal. But far be this. Cease from words that inflate vanity and wound charity."[2]

The remonstrance to the Patriarch and the Emperor produced no immediate effect, and in the mean-

[1] Ep. vi 60. [2] Ep. viii 30.

time John the Faster died in September, 595. He was held in great repute for sanctity on account of his austerity and love of poverty, and the Eastern Church keeps his festival on September 2. The Emperor had lent him large sums of money on the security of his property. After his death his only possessions consisted of a wooden bedstead, a wretched coverlet, and a dilapidated cloak. The Emperor, much struck at this virtue, cancelled the debt, conveyed the poor furniture to the church as relics, and himself slept on the bed during the ensuing Lent.

After some delay Cyriacus, treasurer of the Church of Constantinople, was elected to succeed John. A man of quiet ways and good business habits, he had not mixed in political strife, but had carried on his work undisturbed by the tumult around him. He sent two envoys to Rome with his profession of faith, and Gregory received them with every mark of honour. Gregory wrote two letters to Cyriacus, one a formal letter of congratulation, the other in terms of friendship. He briefly recommended him not to assume the title, and expressed a similar wish in a letter to the Emperor. He reproved some of the bishops for singing the anthem "Haec dies quam fecit Dominus" at the installation of Cyriacus, which he considered a piece of gross flattery, and applicable only to our Lord. He treated the envoys with special attention, associated them publicly with him in the celebration of Mass, and pressed them to prolong their stay through the winter. After their departure, however, he pointed out to them some heretical opinions that they were reported to have held. "After your departure, according to the report

of my beloved deacons, I remembered that your Belovedness had said that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, descending to hell, had saved all those who acknowledged him as God, and freed them from their merited torments. In this I wish your Charity to think far otherwise. For, descending into hell, he liberated by his grace those only who believed that he would come, and also kept his law in this life."[1]

Cyriacus adopted the title, notwithstanding Gregory's friendly letter and behaviour. The Nuncio was forbidden to hold communion with him, and the Emperor again wrote to the Pope, taxing him with indiscretion in blaming Cyriacus, and hoping that peace would not be disturbed for a frivolous title. In his reply Gregory defends himself: "I received his envoys with great affection, I bestowed upon them more honour than previous custom warranted, I joined them with me in celebrating the sacred solemnities of the Mass: for as my deacon ought not to minister in the sacred mysteries to him who has either committed the fault of pride or neglected to correct it in others, so his deacons ought to be present in the celebration of Mass with me, who, by the preservation of God, have not fallen into the error of pride. I have carefully admonished my same brother and fellow-bishop to repress the use of the foolish title, if he wishes to have the peace and goodwill of all. The Piety of my Lord has commanded me this, saying that a scandal ought not to be fostered by the use of a frivolous term. But I ask your Imperial Piety to consider that while some frivolous things are harmless, others are exceedingly hurtful.

[1] Ep. viii 15.

At his coming Antichrist shall say that he is God; will it not be very frivolous, yet exceedingly pernicious? If we attend to the size of the word,[1] it is of two syllables; if to the weight of iniquity, it is universal calamity. I confidently state that if anyone calls himself, or wishes to be called, universal priest, he forestalls Antichrist in his pride, because he proudly places himself above others."[2]

Preparations were made for holding a synod at Constantinople, at which Gregory feared that the title would be discussed, and that the influence of the Emperor might result in conferring it upon the Patriarch. In the emergency Gregory wrote a circular letter to the bishops of Thessalonica, Dyrrachium, Nicopolis, Corinth, Prima Justiniana, Crete, Larissa, and others who were likely to be summoned. He explains his action towards John the Faster and Cyriacus, and continues: "We exhort and persuade that no one of you should at any time accept this title, no one consent to it, no one admit it or affix his signature to any document in which it shall have been written, but, as becomes the ministers of God, let each one keep himself safe from this infectious poison, and give no countenance to the cunning schemer, for it tends to the injury and division of the whole Church, and, as we have said, to the detriment of you all. For if one, as he pretends, is universal, it follows that you are not bishops.

"It has moreover reached us that your Fraternity has been summoned to the city of Constantinople. Although our most Pious Emperor will not permit anything to be done there unlawfully, yet lest per-

[1] *Deum.* [2] Ep. vii 33.

verse men in your assembly should use the occasion either surreptitiously to establish this vain title, or in some other way to lead the Synod into it by cunning devices, and although its acts shall have no force without the authority and assent of the Apostolic See, yet before Almighty God I conjure and warn you that none of you give assent by any persuasion, by any flattery, by any bribes, by any threats, but that you show yourselves, with the thought of the eternal judgement before you, soundly and unanimously opposed to these evil aspirations, and filled with pastoral constancy and apostolic authority, drive away the preying and aggressive wolf, and do not yield to the clamour for the division of the Church. Do not in this matter allow the Synod to be celebrated in any surreptitious manner, which would neither make it legitimate, nor even able to be called a synod."[1]

The Synod was not held, possibly it was frustrated by Gregory's strenuous action. The controversy dragged on through his pontificate, neither the Patriarch nor the Emperor would yield; but Gregory's struggle produced its results after his death, for under his successor, Boniface IV, the Emperor prohibited the title. Whether the evils that Gregory anticipated from the acknowledgement of the title would have ensued, is a matter of conjecture; that he considered it a real danger to the Church cannot be doubted. His whole character precludes the idea of any personal pride or jealousy; he is said to have adopted the title Servant of the Servants of God, retained to this day by his successors, in contradis-

[1] Ep. ix 68.

tinction to the title of Universal Bishop. The assumption gained its chief strength from the support of the Emperor; a word from him would have settled the controversy, as after events testified. If it were an empty title, conferring honour merely, and contained no design beneath it, the Emperor would scarcely have continued the struggle for so many years. Gregory knew the Greek mind, its jealousy of the West, and the tendency of imperial policy, and it is more probable that his mature mind and far-seeing judgement formed a correct estimate of the situation, and that his strenuous efforts and fearless advocacy postponed for a time the ultimate Greek schism.

CHAPTER XII

THE RACES OF THE WEST

While Gregory contested a title of honour with the decrepit luxury of the East, he was planting and asserting the authority of the Church among the hardy races of the West. It was a transition from the perfumed atmosphere of the chamber of death into the fresh breezes of the uplands or the invigorating aroma of the pine forest. The old empire had shrivelled up, the old order of things was passing away, and the fresh vigorous heirs of the empire were establishing and arranging their portions of the inheritance. Gregory stood between the two, bearing with the pettishness of old age, and restraining the impetuosity and the lawlessness of youth. He upheld the authority of the Church against the last efforts of despotism to seize ecclesiastical power in the East, and he secured the hold of the Church over the rising nations of the West.

Soon after his death the deluge burst over the East. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem were swept away in the resistless onset of the Moslems, Africa fell to the Arabs, and the Patriarch of Constantinople subsided into the chief official of the diminished Byzantine Court. To the forethought and energy of Gregory the Church owes the consolidation of the Christianity of the German race, which provided compensation for defections in

the East. Face to face with the Lombards in Italy, while he withstood their incursions he sowed the seeds of their faith, while he struggled with Agilulph he encouraged Theodolinda, and when peace was at length secured, he established it by uniting the nation to the Church. In the midst of the struggle he looked beyond the Alps to the vast tract extending to the Western Ocean, filled with races gradually forming into stable kingdoms, with traditions of barbarism, with intense love of freedom, with untamed passions, with institutions and laws strange and uncouth to the Roman ear. Gregory was the first Pope to set up definite relations between these new kingdoms and the Holy See, and his intervention at a time when these new governments were assuming regular form, happily prevented the Church and its bishops from becoming subservient to the feudal institutions.

Christianity came to Gaul, Britain, and Spain under the Roman Empire, it developed and grew when the Empire became Christian, and was associated with Roman laws and Roman domination. When the new races threw off the yoke and swept away the institutions of their masters, the ecclesiastical government was treated as a part of the Roman system. When they welcomed again the Christian priest into their reconstituted kingdoms, they tried to fit the Church government into their institutions, so that chief and bishop, soldier and priest, might hold their positions on tenure of the rising feudal burdens. At this juncture Gregory tightened the bonds that linked the Frankish bishops to the Roman See; he gathered up the reins of government, and diverted in time the

fealty of the bishops of Gaul from the Frankish kings to the Roman pontiff. Communication between the Church in Gaul and the Holy See had become precarious and uncertain. The Franks, under Clovis, had been converted about 496, but during the intervening time the calamities mentioned in the first chapter had paralysed the action of the Popes in Italy, and the quarrels, wars, and changes amongst the Franks hindered the access of bishops to the Alps, so that from the departure of the imperial troops across the Alps to the time of Gregory, the intercourse between the Catholic Church in Gaul and the Holy See could only be carried on with difficulty.

The position of affairs rendered Gregory's task no easy one. Clovis and his Catholic successors treated the Church generously, richly endowed its benefices, raised its bishops to social rank, and employed strenuous measures to extirpate the remains of paganism. Yet while honouring ecclesiastical dignitaries, the King regarded them as vassals, interfered in the elections, sometimes himself appointed the bishops, intruded laymen into the sees, and sold the dignities to the highest bidder. No synod could be held without his sanction, and generally he strove to exercise a feudal control over the Church he supported. The chronicles of the times present a record of crime, violence, and immorality, the consequence of freedom from control under a newly-formed government. Gregory attempted to reform ecclesiastical abuses, to secure for the ministers of the Church their due position in the State, to accommodate the Church system to the customs and laws of the people, and to strengthen the connection with the Holy See.

Experience taught him that the agents over the patrimony in Italy had proved efficient instruments for dealing with bishops and people, and he adopted the same plan in Gaul with the patrimony in Provence. He announced to the tenants of the Church his intention of sending an agent from Rome, and bids them in the meantime to obey and pay their rents to Arigius, a man of family on the spot. The letter commences: "Although you are surrounded by the disorders of nations, yet we have much reason to surmise that by your good life you are very different from others. Since the title of St Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, points out more clearly to the people around you the dependents of so great a Church, so you ought to excel others by the good repute of your life, and to impress upon those under your charge that they should live uprightly, and recognise him whom they serve, that they should abstain from the rapacity of other nations and from ill deeds, and thus the dependents of the Church will be honoured not only by its name but also by its merits. Be assured that we most constantly think of you."[1]

His next care was to rivet together the Church in Gaul, and to open direct relations with the Holy See. He sent the pallium to Virgilius of Arles, and appointed him his vicar for the dominions of Childebert, King of Austrasia. He ordered him to take measures to repress simony and the intrusion of laymen into ecclesiastical offices, and for that purpose to hold a synod. He also sent a circular letter to all the bishops of Childebert's kingdom, telling them to

[1] Ep. v 31.

obey Virgilius, to attend the Synod, and to extirpate simony and other abuses. To complete the preparation, he wrote to Childebert begging him to assist Virgilius and the bishops in eradicating abuses. He commences the letter to Virgilius: "How sweet is charity that is shown one to another—in absence by memory, in presence by love—which unites the separated, unravels the entangled, levels the unequal, completes the imperfect. . . . For it is clear to all why the holy Faith now advances in the regions of Gaul, since your Fraternity again takes refuge in the ancient customs of this Apostolic See, for to what end but for good do children return to the bosom of their mother? I willingly grant what you ask, lest we seem either to diminish your due honour or contemn the petition of our most Excellent son, King Childebert. . . . I have learnt from reports that in parts of Gaul and Germany no one is raised to sacred orders without giving a gratuity. If this be so, I refer to it with grief, and I denounce it with lamentation, for when the priesthood falls from within it cannot long stand against attack from without. . . . We are informed of another very detestable practice —that on the death of bishops certain laymen, from desire of temporal glory, receive the tonsure, and suddenly become priests. Hence it is evident what kind of priesthood that must be, when a layman is suddenly raised to the sacred generalship, and he who has never been a soldier does not hesitate to become a general in religion. How can he preach who perhaps has never heard a sermon, or correct others' ill-deeds who has not atoned for his own? . . . By the authority of God we commit to your Fraternity

our jurisdiction over the churches in the kingdom of our most Excellent son, Childebert, saving the honour due to each Metropolitan according to ancient custom. We also send you the pallium for your Fraternity to use within the church only at the solemnities of the Mass. When any bishop wishes to take a long journey he cannot pass to other places without the authority of your Holiness. If any inquisition about faith, or a cause about other things, shall arise between bishops, which presents great difficulty, it is to be ventilated and decided by twelve bishops meeting together. If it cannot be settled then, let it be referred to our judgement after investigating the facts."[1]

In the circular to the bishops he announces the appointment of Virgilius, and explains the extent of his authority as above laid down, and continues: "And since it is necessary that at suitable times the bishops should go to him to whom we have granted our position, as often as he thinks fit for the purpose of assembling together, we enjoin that no one shall presume to disobey his orders, nor put off being present at the general meeting, unless infirmity or any other just cause prevent his attendance. Those who through any necessity cannot attend a synod must send a priest or deacon in their place, so that whatever by the help of God shall be defined by our vicar may be known to the absent by a faithful report of their delegates."[2]

These regulations indicate a powerful grasp of the evils. The welding the bishops together under a vicar responsible to the Holy See, their submission

[1] Ep. v 53. [2] Ep. v 54.

to ecclesiastical authority, the decision of their causes by ecclesiastical tribunals, the law of residence and periodical meeting in synod, would completely emancipate the Church from the tendency to feudal control and subservience to the government. He also vigorously attacked the two evils of simony and lay bishops. Considering the share that the king must have had in the intrusion of lay bishops, the following extracts from the letter to Childebert are interesting: "We are exceedingly gratified at the letter of your Excellence, which testifies that you are solicitous with filial affection for the honour and reverence due to priests. In this you manifest to all that you are a faithful worshipper of God when you love his priests with grateful and due veneration, and are anxious with Christian devotion to do whatever pertains to their prosperity. . . . But since some things have come to our ears that offend Almighty God exceedingly, and greatly destroy the honour and reverence due to priests, we beseech that they be amended by the strenuous exercise of your authority, lest rash and perverse deeds should appear inconsistent with your praiseworthy devotion, and your kingdom and your soul should be burdened by the faults of others.

"We have heard that at the death of bishops some laymen have received the tonsure, and have been precipitately raised to the episcopate, and that he who has not been a disciple with ill-considered ambition becomes a master. Since he cannot teach what he has not learnt, he only exercises the priesthood in name, for a layman he remains in his previous words and deeds. How can he intercede for the sins of others who has not wept for his own? Such a pastor does

not defend but deceives the flock, since for very shame he cannot persuade others to do what he does not himself. What else results, but that the people of the Lord are left to be ravaged by robbers, and incur death from the very means whence they should have the powerful assistance of safe protection? Let the highness of your Excellence consider from your own ordinances how evil, how perverse, this is. For it is certain that you would not appoint a general over your army, unless his capacity and fidelity were evident to you, unless the courage and vigilance of his previous life made it clear that he was fit. If, then, to none but to men of this kind the government of an army is committed, what a general of souls should be may be gathered from this comparison. But to us it is shameful, and we blush to say it, that priests seize the generalship for themselves, who have not seen even the beginnings of religious warfare."[1]

According to promise Gregory selected the priest Candidus, a trustworthy and competent man, to manage the patrimony in Gaul, and gave him letters of introduction to King Childebert and Queen Brunehalt, requesting their assistance and protection for him. He reminds Childebert of the glory of being a Catholic in the midst of pagan kings, and firmly lays down the principle that might is not right, and that a Christian king should use noble restraint in the exercise of his power: "Inasmuch as the royal dignity excels that of other men, so surely does the glory of your kingdom exceed the kingdoms of other nations. In the midst of kings it is not exceptional to be a king, but to be a Catholic when others have

[1] Ep. v 55.

not merited it, is glory enough. As the splendour of a great lamp illuminates the darkness of the night by the brightness of its light, so does the brightness of your faith shine and gleam in the dark perfidy of other nations. Whatever glory other kings have, you have; but in this they are completely overshadowed, since they have not the greatest of all gifts, which you have. In order that they may be eclipsed in deeds as they are in faith, let your Excellence always show yourself merciful to your subjects, and if anything should offend you, do not punish it uninvestigated. Then truly will you best please the King of kings, Almighty God, when by restraining your power you think less is lawful to you than you are able to command." [1] He praises Brunehalt for the education of her son, attributing his faith and his zeal for good to her maternal care.[2]

Childebert died the following year 596, and his mother, Brunehalt, became queen-regent over Austrasia and Burgundy. Gregory wrote to her and to the two young kings, Theodoric and Theodebert, asking their countenance and assistance for St. Augustine on his mission to England. In those lawless times history has blackened the name of Brunehalt and accused her of many crimes and atrocities—these, if true, occurred after Gregory's death—but more recent writers have endeavoured to clear her character. She applied for the pallium for the Bishop of Autun, the capital of Burgundy, and Gregory took the opportunity of calling attention to her position between her subjects and God, and of reminding her of some abuses: "You manifest how firmly the mind

[1] Ep. vi 6. [2] Ep. vi 5.

of your Excellence is established in the fear of God among your other works by your praiseworthy love for his priests, and we much rejoice in your Christianity since you strive to increase the honour of those whom you love with veneration as the servants of God. It is becoming in you, most excellent daughter—it is becoming that such should exist, so that you may be subject to a ruler. By this you strengthen your power in your kingdom and with other nations, when you subject your mind to the fear of Almighty God, and as you submit yourself to the service of your Creator, so do you bind your subjects more devotedly to your service." He explains the use of the pallium, and takes care to tell her that it is not granted at her request, but must be applied for by Syagrius, the bishop himself, and that he sends it to his agent Candidus, who will observe the necessary formalities. He begs her to suppress simony and the intrusion of laymen into church offices, thanks her for her kindness to St Augustine, warns her against the schism of the Three Chapters, and continues: "We also exhort you to restrain your subjects by the control of discipline, so that they may not sacrifice to idols, worship in groves, offer sacrilegious sacrifices to heads of animals, for we have heard that many Christians both go to churches and, which is shameful, do not leave the worship of demons. But since this altogether displeases our God, who does not suffer divided minds, make regulations to coerce them from these illicit deeds, lest the sacrament of holy baptism should become to them not a delivery from bondage but a penalty. When you find any peace-breakers, any adulterers, any

robbers, or doers of perverse deeds, delay not to appease God by their correction, so that the scourge of perfidious nations, which, as we see, is raised up for the punishment of many peoples, may not fall upon you."[1]

Not satisfied with his repeated admonitions about the two crying evils of simony and lay intrusion, Gregory despatched Cyriacus, the Abbot of St Andrew's, on a mission to Gaul to stir up the bishops and to convene a synod. On his passage through Marseilles, Cyriacus delivered a letter of introduction to Bishop Serenus, in which Gregory thus speaks of the use of pictures in the church: "I may now mention that I have heard that your Fraternity, solicitous for the worshippers of images, has broken the same images and cast them out of the church. Although we praise your zeal in having nothing adored that is made by hands, yet we tell you that the images ought not to have been broken. For a picture is used in churches that the illiterate may read, by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books. Your Fraternity, therefore, ought to preserve the images, and to prohibit the people from adoring them, so that the ignorant may have a means of obtaining a knowledge of history, while yet the people sin not by the adoration of a picture."[2]

Serenus pretended to doubt the authenticity of this letter, and received another, in which Gregory upbraids the bishop for his unworthy suspicions, and continues: "Tell me, brother, what priest has been heard ever to have done what you have done? If not, or you cannot remember one, do you, despising

[1] Ep. ix 11. [2] Ep. ix 105.

your brethren, think yourself to be alone holy, alone wise? It is one thing to adore a picture, and another to learn from the picture what is to be adored. What writing gives to those who read, a picture gives to the uneducated who look at it, for in it even the ignorant see what they should follow, by it those who know not letters are able to read. Whence, especially amongst the nations, a picture takes the place of reading."[1] He then suggests a method by which the bishop could restore the images that he had broken, without losing dignity.

Cyriacus conveyed Gregory's instructions to many of the bishops of Gaul, whom he strongly urges to remedy the evils before mentioned. In a common letter to the four principal bishops, Syagrius of Autun, Etherius of Lyons, Virgilius of Arles, and Desiderius of Vienne, he repeats at length the arguments against simony and lay intrusion, and, in reference to the disposal of the money received for simoniacal transactions, he says: "When the enemy of souls cannot openly suggest evil deeds to them, he cunningly trips them up by throwing in an appearance of piety, and would perhaps insinuate that something might be accepted from those who have, in order to give to those who have nothing, and thus pours in deadly poison under the concealed excuse of almsgiving. For a hunter does not deceive a wild beast, nor a hawk a bird, if he openly exposes the snare, nor a fisherman catch fish unless he has a hook beneath the food. The craft of the enemy must be thoroughly feared and guarded against, lest those whom he cannot overthrow by open temptation he

[1] Ep. xi 13.

may slay more wickedly by a concealed weapon. Nor can what is given to the poor be considered alms when it is acquired from illicit things, for he who receives what is evil for the purpose of dispensing it for apparent good, injures rather than assists. That alone is pleasing in the sight of our Redeemer which comes, not from illicit things or from iniquity, but is distributed from what is freely given or fairly acquired. Whence also this is certain, that although monasteries and hospitals should be constructed with the money given for sacred orders, it does not avail for reward, for when a perverse man, and a buyer of dignities is introduced into the holy places, and appoints others like himself for gratuities, he destroys more by evilly ordaining than he who receives the price of ordination can possibly build up." He insists furthermore on the celibacy of the clergy, and urges them to hold a synod every year, at which every bishop must attend without excuse: "For some are uninfluenced by love of justice, yet for fear of investigation will abstain from what all know will displease a judge." And he concludes: "Concerning the above-mentioned matters, we wish your Fraternity, by the assistance of God, to summon a synod, and, by the help of our most reverend brother and fellow-bishop Arigius, and our most beloved son Cyriacus the Abbot, strictly to condemn under anathema all that we have pointed out as being opposed to the sacred canons—that is, that no one shall presume to give anything for receiving sacred orders, or to accept what is given, nor anyone dare to be suddenly advanced from a lay habit to sacred government, nor that any woman shall dwell with

priests unless those that the Sacred Canons allow. Our most reverend brother Syagrius the Bishop, with all the Synod, shall, on the return of our son Cyriacus the Abbot, carefully report to us all that has been done, so that thoroughly knowing what has been decreed, with what precautions and how, we may unceasingly render thanks to God for your life and conduct."[1]

By the same messenger Gregory again wrote to Queen Brunehalt[2] to excite her activity against the abuses and to claim her assistance for the Synod, and also a similar letter to the young Kings Theodoric and Theodebert, in which he mentions another evil: "We have heard that the estates of the Church now pay tribute, and we are lost in wonder that unlawful things are demanded from those to whom lawful taxes are remitted."[3]

Besides these efforts to build up the Frankish Church on correct principles, Gregory was equally solicitous over individual cases of injustice or ecclesiastical discipline. He commanded the Bishop of Autun to relinquish jurisdiction over two parishes situated beyond the Alps, which belonged to the Church of Turin,[4] and wrote to the young kings to ask them to use their authority for the restoration.[5] He also ordered the Bishop of Autun to seek out and send back two Italian bishops, who had deserted their sees for misdeeds and taken refuge in Gaul.[6] He confirmed the privileges granted by Pope Virgilius to a monastery at Arles: "For although what has once been sanctioned by the authority of the Apostolic See

[1] Ep. ix 106. [2] Ep. ix 109. [3] Ep. ix 110.
[4] Ep. ix 115. [5] Ep. ix 116. [6] Ep. ix 113.

needs no further confirmation, we from our abundance strengthen again by our authority all that has been decreed by our predecessor for the settlement of the matter."[1] He took pity on the troubles of a person named Hilary, and gave him letters of introduction to Brunehalt and men of influence in Gaul.[2] A nun had been taken from her convent and violently forced to marry, and Gregory wrote severely about it to Virgilius of Arles, and Syagrius of Autun: "If this is so, we grieve exceedingly, lest before Almighty God you have the reward of the office of a hireling, and not that of a pastor, for, without a struggle, you have left a sheep to be torn by the jaws of the wolf. What will you say, what excuse can you give to the future Judge when the looseness of an adulterer does not move you, when the privilege of a religious habit does not excite you to defence, when priestly care does not rouse you up for the protection of the integrity of virginity?" He seasons the rebuke towards the end of the letter: "Consider, dearest brother, that what we say proceeds from our great love, and receive it all in the charity in which it is spoken. For as we are one body in the body of our Redeemer, so I myself suffer the things that I feel must pain you. With what purpose, with what affection I have sent this letter to you, the Author of Truth will reveal to your heart, and therefore, let not this fraternal admonition distress you, for a bitter draught is cheerfully taken when it is offered for the purpose of health."[3]

In spite of Gregory's persistence the evil of simony was not eradicated, and he writes again to the Bishops of Arles, Lyons, Gap, Kings Theodoric and Theode-

[1] Ep. ix 111. [2] Ep. ix 117, 118, 119. [3] Ep. ix 114.

bert, and Queen Brunehalt,[1] insisting on a general synod in order to make a united effort against the trafficking in sacred things. He also wrote to Clothaire, the King of Neustria, exhorting him to attack the evil in his dominions: "We have, moreover, heard that sacred orders are conferred for a gratuity of money. We are exceedingly afflicted when anyone does not attain the gift of God by merit, but leaps into it for a price. And since this simoniacal heresy at its first appearance in the Church was condemned by apostolic authority, we request you, for the sake of eternal reward, to cause a synod to assemble, so that by the definition of all the priests it may be suppressed and thoroughly rooted out, that no one in the future may endanger his soul, and that it may never again be permitted to arise. May Almighty God exalt you above your enemies according as you have zeal for his commands, and have regard for the salvation of souls that perish by this sword."[2]

So anxious was Gregory about the reputation and good life of the clergy that he wrote to Queen Brunehalt a special letter on the subject: "From the report of many we have heard what we cannot speak of without great affliction of heart, that certain priests in your country live immodestly and wickedly. Lest after this rumour the evil should spread, and further ill deeds injure our soul and your kingdom by the wound of this sin, we ought strenuously to exert ourselves to punish it, lest the guilt of a few becomes the perdition of many. For bad priests are the cause of the ruin of a people. For what intercessor can pre-

[1] Ep. xi 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63. [2] Ep. xi 61.

sent himself to plead for the sins of the people when the priest who ought to pray commits greater sins? But since your letter to us discloses that those whose duty it is to proceed against them, have not the care to inquire nor the zeal to punish, we send a person who, with the assistance of your authority, and with other priests, will thoroughly investigate and correct all things before God. Nor should our opinion be disguised, for he who is able and neglects to correct, becomes without doubt partaker of the fault. Provide, therefore, for your soul, provide for your grandsons whom you desire to reign happily, provide for your kingdom, and, before our Creator raise his hand to strike, think most seriously of the correction of this crime, lest afterwards he strike more severely according as he has waited long and mercifully. But know that you offer to God a great sacrifice of atonement if you speedily blot out the stain of this great guilt from your country."[1]

He writes to Serenus of Marseilles about associating with bad priests: "Moreover, beloved, we have heard that your Piety receives wicked men into your society, nay, that you made a familiar friend of a certain priest after he fell and while he still continued in his iniquity, which indeed we do not altogether credit, for he who associates with such a one does not correct his crimes, but seems rather to give license to others to perpetrate the same. But lest he has persuaded you by deceit or dissimulation to associate and be friendly with him, you ought not only to drive him far from you, but by priestly zeal to use every means to check his excess, and by fatherly admonition to

[1] Ep. xi 69.

restrain from their perverseness others who are known to be bad, and strive to recall them to the path of uprightness. But if, after salutary warning, you find that you cannot influence them, see that you cast them also away from you, lest by associating with them their wickedness shall seem not unpleasant to you, and not only they themselves remain uncorrected, but others be corrupted through your reception of them. Consider how execrable it is to men, and how dangerous in the sight of God, that he should foster vices whose duty it is to punish crimes. Attend, therefore, dearest brother, diligently to these things, and so strive to act that you may wholesomely correct the bad and not bring scandal into the minds of your children by companionship with the wicked."[1]

The relations that Gregory had established with the Frankish kingdoms, and his control over the Church in Gaul, may be gathered from the following extracts from a letter to Queen Brunehalt. She had sent envoys to request privileges for some monasteries, and to ask his good offices in dealing with the Emperor at Constantinople. He grants the privileges, and continues: "Greeting you beforehand with paternal charity, we are instructing our illustrious sons, your servants and envoys, Burgoaldo and Varmaricario, that our secret intentions shall correspond with the requests in your letter, for they have thoroughly acquainted us with all things that were commanded them. Concerning which it shall be our care at a future time to indicate to your Excellence what has been done. For whatever is possible, whatever is useful for obtaining a good understanding

[1] Ep. xi 13.

between you and the Republic, we wish to accomplish by God's help with the greatest devotedness.

"After investigating all that has been said about him, we find nothing blameworthy in our most reverend brother and fellow-bishop Mennas, who has proved that he is innocent of the accusations against his reputation, pledging himself moreover by oath on the most sacred body of blessed Peter the Apostle. We have permitted him to return home free and acquitted, for as it is right to punish canonically a fault where it exists, so it is just in no way to detain or afflict him whose innocence is proved.

"Concerning the bishop, whose weakness in his head does not allow him to exercise his office, as your Magnificence has told us, we have written to our brother and fellow-bishop Etherius, that if he has intervals in his infirmity he may acknowledge by a petition that he is unable to fulfil the duties of his office, and request that another should be ordained for his church, for during the life of a bishop, whom sickness, not fault, withdraws from the administration of his office, the canons do not allow another to be consecrated in his place. If he does not at any time return to his duties in a sound mind, some person of approved life and conduct should be found to look after the care of souls, and to manage with salutary regulations the business and interests of the same church, and if such a one survives he should succeed to the see. If there are any to be promoted to sacred orders or to clerical ministry, they should be set apart and announced to our aforesaid most reverend brother Etherius, provided that they are of that diocese, and if after investigation they are free from

fault and canonical objection he can ordain them. Let the solicitude of your Excellence assist our arrangement, so that the interest of the Church, which is your chief regard, may not suffer, and the increase of reward may add to the goods of your Excellence.

"We have endeavoured to sanction all things that you wish for the protection of the places about which your Excellence has written. But lest our decrees should at any time be suppressed by the governors of the places, because they know that certain things are forbidden them, these same constitutions should be inserted in the public records, so that, as they are kept in ours, so also shall they be kept in the royal archives."[1]

The documents alluded to in the last paragraph contain passages which manifest that Gregory had obtained considerable control over the depredations of the temporal authority on ecclesiastical property in Gaul, and had fully asserted the independence of the ecclesiastical power over it. It is significant that Gregory issued them at the request of the Queen, and desired them to be inserted in the official records of the kingdom. The concluding paragraph of the documents is sufficient evidence that even in a half-formed nation Gregory asserted the principle of the defence of ecclesiastical property by ecclesiastical censures, and that he feared not to issue them before the highest secular authority: "Therefore, we decree that whatsoever is contained in the pages of this our precept and decree shall be observed for ever by you and by all who succeed you in your title and office, and by those interested therein. If any king, priest,

[1] Ep. xiii 6.

judge, or secular person, knowing this our constitution, shall attempt to contravene it, let him be deprived of the dignity of his power and honour, and let him know that he is guilty in the divine judgement of committing iniquity. And unless he shall restore what was evilly taken away, or atone for the unlawful acts by due penance, let him be refused the most sacred body and blood of our God and Redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ, and let him be subject to strict punishment in the eternal judgement. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon all in the same place who justly observe it, so that here they may receive the fruit of good actions, and find the rewards of eternal peace before the strict Judge."[1]

Sufficient has been adduced to convey an idea of Gregory's work amongst the nations of Gaul. The circumstances of the time should be taken into consideration. History pictures for us a people half civilised, chiefs lawless and headstrong, kings with undefined power and unrestrained temper, and records a series of turbulent scenes of strife and crime. The Church suffered from the encroachment of the Government and the violence of the nobles, from the laxity of internal discipline and contact with gold. In spite of distance and difficult communication, in spite of the strife of the Franks and the aggression of the Lombards in Italy, Gregory brought the Church of Gaul into close connection with the Holy See, knitted together its own internal government, withdrew it from the control of the State, purified its ministers, and established friendly relations with

[1] Ep. xiii 8. The authenticity of this passage has been attacked, but it is vindicated by Mabillon.

princes. It was entirely an ecclesiastical movement; no attempt to attain political influence or to gain political assistance can be detected in his letters, although in his struggle with the Lombards assistance from the Franks would have been grateful. He did not pit one race against another, he did not according to precedent invite Frank to slaughter Lombard, but he succeeded in making both look with friendship on the Holy See; he made them feel that he was a common father, that the Holy See upheld justice, that he was not identified with the old order, the old Roman government, the old empire, but rather that under the sway of the Church he welcomed the races of the West with paternal affection.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ANGLO-SAXONS

The features of the Saxon slaves had not faded from the mind of Gregory, nor had his own missionary attempt left his thoughts. The zeal that then inspired him became a responsibility when his fatherly care extended over the whole Church, and what he so eloquently urged on Pope Benedict I now assumed all the force of a duty. A letter to Syagrius of Autun[1] written in 594 tells us that he kept in mind the desolation of our forefathers, while he waited till all was ready to organise a missionary expedition. He evidently formed a plan for collecting English youths in Rome, educating them, and making them the instruments of imparting the faith to their fellow-countrymen, for writing in 595 to Candidus, his agent for the patrimony in Gaul, he begs him "to purchase with the money that you have received some clothes for the poor, or to procure English boys of the age of seventeen or eighteen, so that they may be brought up for God in monasteries. Since those whom you will find there will be pagans, I wish them to be accompanied by a priest in case they fall sick on the road, so that if he sees them likely to die he may baptise them."[2] The presence of these Anglo-Saxons in Rome served also to excite interest in the work of conversion on which Gregory had set his heart.

[1] Ep. ix 108. [2] Ep. vi 7.

In choosing men for the difficult and perilous mission, Gregory did not forget the little band that many years before had secretly issued from the monastery of St. Andrew on the Coelian, and to that house and to his own brethren he naturally turned. Perhaps some survived of those who twenty years before had eagerly volunteered to join him in the apostolic work, and who now from reverence to his authority and attachment to his person, willingly placed themselves in his hands. He selected Augustine the Prior for the chief of our apostles; the only other names among them that are preserved are those of Laurence, Peter, and John. He doubtless spent much time in exhorting and encouraging, in training and instructing them, and in breathing into them that self-sacrifice and zeal for souls which originally prompted him to undertake the mission, and perhaps renewed his desire to acocmpany them. When all preparations were completed he summoned them to his presence, gave them the apostolic blessing and kiss of peace, and "dismissed them on their way rejoicing" in the summer of 596.

They left their peaceful monastic home as children leave their father's house for a foreign land, with bitter parting, lingering regrets, and bright hopes. And as their native shores receded the last link of the past was broken, and they looked over the waters to a dim uncertain future. They landed at Marseilles, and, after recovery from the tedious sea voyage, found their way to Aix in Provence. There sinister rumours brought them to a halt, eager tongues told them that a frightful and tempestuous sea separated Britain from the mainland, that the inhabitants, far

from being angels, were uncouth savages, idolaters, barbarous in their customs, cruel to strangers, that, if allowed to land at all, death inevitably awaited them, and, in any case, there was but faint hope of inducing such savages to listen to them. The distress of the voyage and the hardship of travel had told upon them; strange lands, strange customs, and strange language bewildered them; their enthusiasm had begun to cool, and the future seemed so uncertain that they sought the hospitality of the monastery of Lerins, an island off the coast between Antibes and Frejus. There, after consultation, Augustine agreed to return to Rome to seek instructions from Gregory.

Augustine laid at the feet of his master the trials and the discouragements, the fears and the uncertainty of his brethren, and their kind reception at Marseilles, Aix, and Lerins. In persisting in his determination for the prosecution of the mission, Gregory's knowledge of human nature prompted him to temper firmness with tenderness, and in the earnestness with which he rekindled Augustine's zeal he mingled words of encouragement and affection. He saw the necessity of greater discipline and one directing head; hence, he appointed Augustine abbot of the little community in order to give him greater authority. He sent him back with full instructions, and with letters to Stephen, Abbot of Lerins, Evagrius of Marseilles, and Proteus of Aix, in acknowledgement of their kindness to the missionaries. Resting at the monastery at Lerins the brethren awaited the return of Augustine with mixed feelings: of hope for a message of recall, of fear for an order to proceed, of shame for a mission relin-

quished. They warmly welcomed Augustine again to their midst, and after the first greetings he delivered Gregory's letter to them.

"To the brethren on their way to England. Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to his brethren, servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since it would be better not to begin good works than to think of withdrawing from them when once commenced, it is right, my dearest sons, that you should strenuously make every effort to complete the good work which, by God's help, you have begun. Be not disheartened at the hardships of the journey or the tongues of evil-speaking men, but with all eagerness and fervour carry out what at God's suggestion you have undertaken, knowing that the glory of an eternal reward is given to great labour. With humble reverence obey in all things Augustine your prior, whom on his return to you we have appointed your abbot. Be assured that whatever you do according to his directions will tend to the profit of your souls. May Almighty God shield you with his grace, and grant that I may see the fruits of your exertions in our everlasting country, so that, though I am denied a part in your labours, I may become an associate in your reward, since, had I my wish, I would labour with you. May God take you, my dearest brothers, into his keeping. Dated this 23rd day of July, in the fourteenth year of our most religious Emperor, our Lord Mauritius Tiberius Augustus, and the thirteenth from the consulship of the same and of the Indiction XIV."[1]

This letter, together with the special instructions

[1] Ep. vi 51.

and exhortations which Gregory communicated through Augustine, infused fresh spirit into the missionaries. The regret expressed in the letter, "Had I my wish I would labour with you," bringing to mind the noble sacrifice made by Gregory in times past, and his willingness even now to leave his work and his position to share their toil and danger, urged them to prove themselves worthy disciples of so heroic a master. Gregory did not leave them entirely to their own resources, but fortified them with letters to influential persons on the route. To Virgilius of Arles he says: "We have every confidence that your Fraternity is devoted to good works, and of your own accord associates yourself in undertakings that are pleasing to God, yet we think it useful to address you with fraternal charity, so that the assistance that you would willingly give may be stimulated by our letter. We therefore notify to your Holiness that we have sent Augustine, servant of God, the bearer of this, for the benefit of souls in a place which he himself will tell you when he reaches you. In which mission you must help him by prayer and assistance, and if need shall arise give him the countenance of your encouragement, and refresh him, as is becoming, with your fatherly and priestly consolation, so that while he has been assisted with the solace of your Holiness, if, as we anticipate, he shall gain anything for our God, you also may obtain a reward who have devotedly ministered to the good work by the abundance of your encouragement."[1] He wrote in a similar strain to Pelagius, Bishop of Tours, Serenus of Marseilles, Desiderius of Vienne, and Syagrius of

[1] Ep. vi 53.

Autun. From motives of prudence he suppresses the name of the place, leaving the explanation to Augustine. He also addressed letters to Theodoric and Theodebert, whose dominions the missionaries traversed: "We have heard," he says, "that the English nation has been led by the mercy of God eagerly to desire conversion to the faith of Christ, but that the priests in their neighbourhood are negligent, and do not by their exhortations fan the flame of the desire. For this reason we have determined to send to those parts Augustine, servant of God, and the bearer of this letter, whose zeal and devotedness are well known to us, and with him other servants of God. And we have instructed them to take with them some priests of the neighbouring country, by whose assistance they may ascertain the disposition of this people, and by exhortation encourage their good intentions as far as God permits. And in order that they may be fruitful and suitable for this ministry, we entreat your Excellence, whom we greet with all fatherly affection, that those whom we have sent may deserve to find the benefit of your good-will. And since souls are at stake, may your influence protect and assist them, so that Almighty God, who knows that you give this assistance in his cause with devoted heart and pure zeal, may take all your affairs under his merciful care, and conduct you through earthly power to his kingdom in heaven."[1]

In a letter to Brunehalt, he says: "Since, then, your Excellence is accustomed to be eager in good works, deign to consider him as recommended in all things, as well from our request as from regard to the

[1] Ep. vi 58.

fear of God, and zealously bestow upon him the favour of your protection, and give him the assistance of your patronage in his work. And in order to render your reward abundant, furnish him with a safe conduct on his way to the above-named English people. So may our God, who in this world has adorned you with works well pleasing to him, grant you to rejoice with his saints both here and in rest everlasting."[1] The Queen cordially received the missionaries, facilitated their journey, and Gregory gratefully acknowledged her attention.[2] These letters indicate the care taken by Gregory over the journey, as well as the precautions against a repetition of the discouragement.

With the assistance thus afforded through Gregory's letters, and after some opposition, laborious travelling and a tossing on the sea, Augustine and his companions reached Richborough, and landed at Ebbsfleet in the Island of Thanet. The low flat beach and treeless waste would not tend to raise their spirits or inspire them with hopeful anticipations. The addition of Frankish priests and interpreters raised their numbers to forty. They sent deputies to King Ethelbert at Canterbury, and with some trepidation awaited their return. Ethelbert, whom his Christian Queen Bertha and her chaplain, St Luidhard, had probably familiarised with the faith, returned words of encouragement, ordered them to be hospitably treated, and signified his intention of meeting them on the coast. On the appointed day the King, surrounded by his chiefs and retinue, seated himself in the open air as a precaution against spells, and

[1] Ep. vi 59. [2] Ep. ix 11.

summoned the missionaries to his presence. Aware of the critical nature of the interview, the monks prepared to meet the King with prayer, and with what solemnity they could muster. They ranged themselves in procession, headed by their silver cross and image of our Saviour, and with the tones of their monastic chant heralding their approach, they appeared before the King. The unusual chant swelling and fading in the air, the spare forms of the monks, their modest mien and foreign garb, as the procession wound along the shore, made its impression on the pagan monarch. He bade them be seated, and listened attentively to Augustine's explanation of the object of their mission, a mission of peace and charity, to make known to them the love of God and the work of Christ, and to secure eternal goods for him and his kingdom. The King heard them graciously, and replied: "The words and promises you bring are fair, but newborn and of doubtful authority. Since you are foreigners and have come a long way to my country, and since, as far as I can understand the object of your visit, you are come with the desire of imparting to me what you yourselves believe to be true and excellent, we do not wish to molest you, but rather to receive you with kindness and hospitality. We shall therefore supply you with necessary food. Nor do we forbid you to preach and make what converts you can to the faith of your religion."[1]

Ethelbert prepared a house for them at Canterbury, supplied furniture and provisions at his own expense, and issued orders for the protection of their persons. In due time the missionaries left Thanet to take

[1] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* i 25.

possession of their residence in the royal city. The procession again formed, and wended its way through the rude huts and irregular streets thronged by the Saxons, who with awe and curiosity gazed at the hooded figures with downcast eyes singing in a strange tongue the anthem: "Lord, we pray thee of thy mercy, take away thine anger from this city, and from thy holy house, for we have sinned, Alleluia." Settled in their abode they commenced their monastic services in the old church of St Martin on the outskirts, where Queen Bertha received the consolations of religion before the death of her chaplain. Interest and curiosity led the natives to crowd into the little church and intently watch the ceremonial. The missionaries commenced to preach and to instruct; their prayers, watchings, fasting, their refusal of gifts, their quiet cheerful spirit, gave weight to their words. "Many believed and were baptised, won over by the simplicity of their blameless lives, and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine."[1] Thus commenced the fulfilment of Gregory's hopes for the three English slaves; Alleluia had been sung in the English land, and the angels were being snatched from the wrath of God.

The work of conversion spread rapidly; the monks' holiness of life and the sanctity of their work received the divine sanction of miracles, and numbers flocked to the font. To the joy of Queen Bertha, her husband bent his neck to the yoke of Christ, and amidst an assembled host of his nation on Whit Sunday 597 was admitted as a little child into the Kingdom of Heaven. During the year ten thousand of

[1] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* i 26.

his subjects followed the example of the king. They came spontaneously, for Ethelbert refused to employ any compulsion. At the cheering prospects Augustine hastened to comply with the wish of Gregory, and sought episcopal consecration at the hands of Virgilius of Arles, Gregory's Vicar in those regions. On his return Ethelbert gave proof of the sincerity of his faith by leaving his royal palace and placing it at the disposal of the monks. This palace developed into the monastery of Christ Church, and the Cathedral of Canterbury.

The delight of Gregory at the success of the English mission may be imagined. He wrote to his friend Eulogius of Alexandria: "Since I know well that in the midst of your good deeds you rejoice in those of others, I will then repay your favour and announce tidings not very dissimilar. The English nation situated in a little angle of the world, up to this time faithless, have remained in the worship of stocks and stones. And now by the help of your prayers God put it into my mind to send to it a monk of my monastery to preach the Gospel. By my license he has been consecrated bishop by the bishops of Germany, and by their assistance he went to the above-mentioned nation at the extremity of the world, and news has just reached me of his safety and his wonderful doings; that either he or those who were sent with him, have been so conspicuous by great miracles amongst this people, that they seem to have the power of the Apostles in the signs which they have wrought. On the feast of our Lord's nativity in the first year of the Indiction, as I hear from our same brother and fellow-bishop, more than ten thousand

English were baptised. I mention this that you may know what has been done at this farthest extremity of the world by your prayers while you are talking to me about the people of Alexandria. Your prayers are fruitful in places where you are not, while your works are manifest in the place where you are."[1]

The account of the prosperous state of the mission was conveyed to Gregory by Laurence and Peter, whom Augustine sent back to Rome to report progress, to ask for more help, and to obtain the solution of some doubts that arose from the anomalous position of the rising Church. Gregory welcomed them with delight and affection, kept them some time in Rome, gave them formal answers to Augustine's questions, and sent them back with twelve fresh missionaries, among whom were Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Ruffinianus. He armed them with credentials to the bishops of Gaul. "Though the duty of your office warns your Fraternity to give every assistance to religious men, especially when they are labouring for the good of souls, yet it is not amiss if the words of our letter give an impulse to your solicitude, for as a fire is made brighter by the wind, so the zeal of an upright mind is stimulated by exhortation. Since, then, by the grace of our Redeemer, so great a multitude of the English nation is converted to the Christian faith, that our most reverend common brother and fellow-bishop Augustine, declares that those who are with him are not sufficient to carry out this work in every place, we have determined to send him some monks with our much-beloved sons, Laurence the Prior and Mellitus

[1] Ep. viii 30.

the Abbot. Therefore I beg your Fraternity to show them fitting charity, and readily to help them in whatever may be necessary, so that, through your assistance, they may have no cause for delay on their journey, and may rejoice in the refreshment that your encouragement brings them, and that by showing them kindness you may become a partner in the cause in which they are engaged."[1] Besides addressing in similar terms the Bishops of Toulon, Marseilles, Chalons, Metz, Vienne, Arles, Lyons, Gap, Paris, Rouen, and Angers, Gregory wrote to Clothaire of Neustria, Theodoric and Theodebert, and to Queen Brunehalt, thanking them for past favours and commending the new missionaries to their protection.

The letters of Gregory to Ethelbert and Bertha that were delivered by Mellitus have a special interest, and manifest his encouragement, fatherly advice and solicitude. To Ethelbert he writes: "Almighty God raises certain good men to the government of his people, in order that through them he may impart the gifts of his mercy to all under their sway. And such we gather has been accomplished in regard to the English nation, over which your Glory has been placed, in order that, through the favours that are granted to you, the heavenly gifts may be bestowed upon the nation under your rule. Guard then, glorious son, with sedulous care the grace you have received from above; lose no time in extending the faith of Christ among your subjects, in their conversion multiply the zeal of your uprightness, put down the worship of idols, lay low the structures of their temples; by exhortation, by threats, by conciliation,

[1] Ep. xi 58.

by correction, and, by the openness of your example, build up your subjects in the utmost purity of life, so that you may receive the heavenly reward of him whose name and whose knowledge you have spread upon the earth. For he shall render the name of your Glory still more glorious to posterity, since you seek to uphold his honour amongst the nations.

"Thus of old the most pious Emperor Constantine, bringing the Roman Republic from the corrupt worship of idols, subjected it, with himself, to Jesus Christ our Almighty Lord God, and with his people turned to him with all his heart. Whence it happened that he surpassed the renown of previous princes, and excelled his predecessors as much in good works as in reputation. Let then your Glory hasten to implant in the hearts of all the kings and peoples under you the knowledge of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so that you may surpass the ancient kings of your nation in merits and renown, and according as you blot out the sins of others among your subjects, you may atone the more securely for your own sins before the terrible judgement of Almighty God.

"Our most reverend brother Augustine, bishop, is proficient in the monastic rule, filled with the knowledge of Holy Scripture, and by God's grace endowed with good works. Give a willing ear to his admonitions, devotedly fulfil them, and store them carefully in your memory. If you give heed to him when he speaks to you for Almighty God, the more speedily will Almighty God hear him when he prays for you. If, which God forbid, you disregard his words, how shall Almighty God hear his prayers for you, seeing

that you refuse to hear his pleadings for God? With all your mind, then, bind yourself to him in the zeal of faith, and assist his efforts with the power that is given you from on high, that he may make you a partaker of his kingdom, whose faith you have caused to be received and protected in your kingdom. . . .

"I have forwarded you a few trifling tokens of esteem, which, however, you will not account trifling when you remember that they come to you with the blessing of blessed Peter the Apostle. May God Almighty, then, vouchsafe to preserve and bring to perfection the grace which he has begun. May he preserve your life for the space of many a year, and after a lengthened term on earth, may he receive you into the assembly of saints in his heavenly country. My Lord and son, may heavenly grace keep your Excellence in safety."[1] The presents were probably relics.

To Queen Bertha, he says: "Our most beloved sons, Laurence the priest and Peter the monk, on their return, told us how graciously your Glory received our most reverend brother and fellow bishop, Augustine, and the great consolation and affection you bestowed upon him, and we have blessed Almighty God that in his mercy he has deigned to reserve the conversion of the English nation for your reward. For even, as by Helena of precious memory, mother of the most pious Emperor Constantine, the hearts of the Romans were enkindled for the faith of Christ, so also we trust, through the zeal of your Glory, his mercy has been at work in the English nation. In truth, long ago you should with discretion, and like

[1] Ep. xi 66.

a good Christian, have influenced the mind of our glorious son your consort, for the salvation of his kingdom and his soul to follow the faith you practise, so that by him and through him a meet reward of heavenly joy should have come to you in the conversion of the whole nation. For when once, as we have said, your Glory was fortified with the true faith, and well instructed in it, the task should have been neither tedious nor difficult to you. And since by the will of God now is the fitting time, strive that with the help of divine grace you may recover with increase what has been lost by neglect.

"Strengthen, then, by assiduous exhortation the heart of your glorious consort in affection towards the faith of Christ; may your solicitude obtain for him increase in the love of God, and enkindle in his soul a desire for the thorough conversion of the nation under his care, so that he may offer a great sacrifice to Almighty God through the zeal of your devotedness, and the reports we hear of you may still increase and be confirmed in every way. For your name has reached not only the Romans who have prayed fervently for your welfare, but different parts of the world, even Constantinople and the ears of the most Serene prince. As the consolation of your Christianity has been a joy to us, may the angels in heaven rejoice at the completion of your work. In aid, then, of the aforesaid most reverend and fellow bishop and the servants of God whom we have sent, use all zeal and devotedness in the conversion of your nation, so that in this world you may reign happily with our glorious son your consort, and after a lengthened term of years may receive the joys of the life to come which

knows no end. We pray Almighty God to enkindle the heart of your Glory with the fire of his grace, so as both to fulfil what we recommend, and to grant you an everlasting recompense for the work that is so pleasing to him."[1]

A passage in the letter suggests that Gregory had some misgivings about Bertha's efforts to convert her husband. The letter to Ethelbert exhorts him to destroy the pagan temples, but on further consideration he modified his view, and a few days after the departure of the additional missionaries he sent a letter to overtake Mellitus, which testifies to the care and deliberation that he bestowed on the question: "After the departure of our brethren with you, we were in great suspense, for we had heard nothing of the success of your journey. When Almighty God shall have brought you to our most reverend brother Augustine, tell him what I have long deliberated over on the subject of the English, which is this, that the temples of the idols in that country ought not to be demolished, but that the actual idols therein should be destroyed. Bless water, sprinkle the temples with it, erect altars, and deposit relics in them: for if the temples in question have been well constructed, they should be transferred from the worship of idols to the service of the true God, in order that, when the people see that the temples are not destroyed, putting error from their heart they may come to know and worship the true God, and more readily resort to the places with which they are familiar. Moreover, since it is their practice to slay numerous oxen in the service of their devils, for this solemnity substitute some corre-

[1] Ep. xi 29.

sponding one: on the day of the dedication of the church, or of the martyrs whose relics are deposited therein, they may construct tents of the branches of trees near the same churches into which the old temples have been converted, and celebrate their solemnities with religious festivity. Let them no longer sacrifice animals to the devils, but kill them for their own use to the glory of God, and give thanks of their abundance to the Giver of all things; and thus while some external rejoicing is preserved to them, they may the more easily appreciate interior consolations. For it is undoubtedly impossible to cut off everything from their rude minds at once. He who attempts to climb a height ascends by steps or paces, not by vaulting. . . . Tell, then, beloved, these things to our aforesaid brother, who on the spot may consider how the whole matter should be arranged."[1]

In Gregory's letter to Augustine the joy and exultation of his heart break forth in terms that show his real love for his disciple, and his solicitude for his individual soul. He did not allow the abnormal success of the mission, nor the immense gain of so many souls, to blind him to the present danger of pride, from the magnitude of the results and the power of miracles, and with his congratulations he mingles words of warning: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good-will; for the grain of wheat which fell into the earth is dead, so that he should not reign in heaven alone by whose death we live, by whose weakness we are strengthened, by whose suffering we are freed from suffering,

[1] Ep. xi 76.

through whose love we seek in Britain the brethren whom we knew not, by whose favour we have found those whom we sought without knowing them. Who is able to declare the joy that sprang up in all the hearts of the faithful in this place, since the English nation by the grace of Almighty God and the labours of your Fraternity hath been snatched from the darkness of error and enveloped in the light of faith? For with a sound mind it now tramples the idols under foot, to which it was hitherto subject with insane fear; for it now submits to God with a pure heart; now it is bound by the rules of holy teaching after falling into evil deeds; now it places its mind under the divine law, and is aided by the knowledge of it; now it is humbled to the dust in prayer, and lies prostrate in spirit on the ground. Whose work is this but his who saith: *My Father worketh until now and I work.*[1] Who, to show that he converted the world, not by the wisdom of men, but by his own power, chose illiterate men to send into the world to preach. This also has he done now, for he has deigned to perform deeds of strength amongst the English people through weak instruments.

"There is, dearest brother, in that heavenly gift what should inspire exceeding great fear. I well know, beloved, that Almighty God hath wrought through you great miracles in the nation that he hath willed to select. In the same heavenly gift there is need for you to rejoice while you fear, and fear while you rejoice. You can rejoice indeed, for the souls of the English are drawn through exterior miracles to interior grace. Yet you must also fear, lest amidst

[1] John v 17.

the signs that are wrought by you, your feeble mind should be lifted up in presumption in its power, and should fall through vain glory from within according as it is exalted in honour from without. We ought to bear in mind that, when the disciples returned with joy from preaching and said to their heavenly master, *Lord, the devils also are subject to us in thy name*, they were immediately answered, *But yet rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.*[1] For they, in rejoicing over miracles, had set their hearts on a joy private and temporal. But from the private joy they are recalled to the public, from the temporal to the eternal, when he said to them: *In this rejoice, that your names are written in heaven.* All the elect do not work miracles, but all their names are written in heaven. For to the disciples of the truth there should be no joy, except for that good which they have in common with all, and wherein their joy has no end.

"It remains, then, dearest brother, that, in the midst of what you do externally by the power of God, you should thoroughly examine yourself within, and should thoroughly understand yourself, who you are, and how much grace is needed in this nation, for whose conversion you have received even the gift of miracles. If you remember that you have offended our Creator in word or deed, keep this always in your mind, that the remembrance of your fault may repress the mounting pride of your heart. And whatever power for working signs you shall receive, or have received, set it down as given not to yourself, but to

[1] Luke x 20.

those for whose salvation such gifts are conferred upon you. . . .

"I ought to say something about miracles that have been wrought by the reprobate, for your Fraternity will know what Truth spake in the gospel: *Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in thy name? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me you that work iniquity.*[1] In the midst of signs and miracles the mind must be placed under great restraint, lest perchance a man seek his own glory in these things, and exult in the personal joy of his own exaltation. Through wonders the gain of souls should be sought, and his glory by whose power the wonders are wrought. One sign the Lord hath given us wherein we may rejoice exceedingly, and whereby we may recognise in ourselves the glory of election: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one for another*,[2] and this sign the Prophet sought when he said: *Show me a token for good, that they who hate me may see, and be confounded.*[3]

"I say these things because I desire to bow down the mind of my hearer in humility. But I know that your humility hath a confidence of its own. I myself a sinner have a most certain hope that by the grace of the Almighty Creator and Redeemer our God and Lord Jesus Christ your sins have already been forgiven. Nor will your guilt bring sorrow in the time to come, for you labour to give joy in heaven by the conversion of many. He the same our Creator and

[1] Matt. vii 22. [2] John xiii 35. [3] Ps. lxxxv 17.

Redeemer said, when speaking of the repentance of men: *I say to you that even so shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.*[1] And if there be great joy in heaven over one penitent, what may we suppose the joy to be when so vast a nation is converted from its error, and coming to the faith condemns by repentance all the evil that it has done? In the joy of heaven and the angels let us repeat the very words of the angels with which we began. Let us say, and all unite in saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."[2]

This letter breathes the spirit of the watchful ruler, the loving father, the humble saint, the man of God; it reflects the highest honour on the humble writer, who in the midst of his exultation at the glory of his son can speak words of warning, and of the humble son who in the midst of success could receive such words with respectful reverence. Gregory answered with great care and minuteness the questions submitted to him by Augustine. They consisted mainly of matters of discipline arising from the new order of things, on which it was desirable to obtain authoritative decisions. Gregory wrote formal replies to the ten questions, and they are evidence of his interest in the state of the country and of his tender consideration. Augustine asked for directions about the method of life of the bishop amongst his clergy, and the management of the offerings of the faithful. Gregory cites the life of the first Christians, and recommends the bishop and clergy to live together as in the primitive Church, taking their meals at the

[1] Luke xv 7. [2] Ep. xi 28.

same table, and having all things in common. "It is the practice of the Apostolic See," he says, "to deliver instructions to bishops at their consecration, that any payment which accrues to them is to be divided into four parts—one for the bishop and his household for hospitality to guests and strangers, one for the clergy, the third for the poor, the fourth for the repair of buildings. But since your Fraternity, who is well versed in monastic rule, ought not to live apart from your clergy of the English Church lately by the power of God brought to the faith, your method of life ought to be formed on the model of our fathers of the primitive Church, amongst whom no one said that anything he possessed was his own, but to them everything was in common." Clerics not in sacred orders who were married should live apart, and receive their stipends at home.

In the adoption of ritual and ceremonial he says: "Your Fraternity is familiar with the practice of the Roman Church, in which, as you well know, you were brought up. But it will satisfy me if, when you have found anything more acceptable to Almighty God, whether in the Roman, French, or any other Church, you carefully select and introduce by special appointment into the English Church what you have thus been able to collect from many churches. We should not love things for the sake of the place, but rather places for the sake of the things. Choose, therefore, from each church whatever is devout, religious, and right, embody them into a single collection, and fix them in the minds of the English as their custom."

In assigning punishment for offences, especially sacrilege, Gregory applies to the Saxons the principles

he had already laid down. "For we ought to exact discipline from the faithful as good fathers would treat their children in the flesh, whom they beat for their faults, although at the time that they inflict pain on them they intend to make them their heirs, and they keep their goods for those whom they seem to chastise in anger. This affection then should be kept in mind, and should regulate the measure of correction, so that the mind may do nothing whatever without the guide of reason. You ask also how restitution should be made for what is stolen out of a church, but God forbid that the church should receive interest on the earthly possessions that she appears to lose, or to seek gain out of a loss."

On account of circumstances stated by Augustine, Gregory allowed some indulgence in marrying within the prohibited degrees, and his treatment of the question gives an insight into his forethought and consideration. "Since amongst the English many are reported, while they were still in infidelity, to have already contracted such wicked marriages, let them be admonished when coming to the faith to refrain from them, and let them know that this is a grievous sin. Let them fear the terrible judgement of God lest they incur eternal torments for carnal pleasure. They are not on this account to be deprived of the communion of the body and blood of the Lord, lest we appear to punish the sins committed by them through ignorance before the cleansing of baptism. For at such times Holy Church corrects some things with zeal, some she tolerates in gentleness, some she leaves unnoticed and suffers in tenderness, so that passing over and bearing with them she is able to check the evil

that she opposes. But let all who come to the faith be admonished not to venture to commit any such sin. They who afterwards are guilty of so doing should be deprived of the communion of the body and blood of the Lord, for as the fault should be somewhat tolerated in those who have acted through ignorance, so should it be stringently punished in those who are not afraid to sin with knowledge."

This relaxation of discipline drew a remonstrance from Felix, Bishop of Messina, to whom Gregory replies: "Concerning what I wrote about marriages between relatives to Augustine, Bishop of the English nation, and, as you remember, your disciple, you must understand that I wrote, not generally for the rest of Christendom, but specially for himself and the English nation, which has lately been brought over to the faith, that it might not fall back from its good beginnings through dread of over-severe discipline. Accordingly the whole city of Rome can testify that in giving these instructions I did not intend that, when they were firmly rooted in the faith, those should not be separated who were found to have married within the prescribed degree of consanguinity or line of affinity, namely, the seventh generation. It is often fitting to teach those who are still novices first by word and example to avoid what is unlawful, and reasonably and faithfully exclude what they have afterwards to do in such matters. For, like the Apostle, who says: *I gave you milk to drink, not meat*,[1] we have granted this indulgence to them alone, and, as we have said, it is not to hold good in after times, in order that the good may not be plucked up

[1] 1 Cor. iii 2.

before it has taken firm root, but that its first growth may be strengthened and preserved until maturity. Evidently if we have done anything other than what is proper, you must not ascribe it to laxity but to commiseration, and that it is so I call God to witness, who knoweth the thoughts of all men, to whose eyes all is naked and open."[1]

Augustine asks whether a bishop can be consecrated without the presence of others. "In the English Church," Gregory replies, "in which you are as yet the only bishop, you cannot ordain a bishop otherwise than without the presence of others; but when bishops come from Gaul let them assist you as witnesses in the consecration of a bishop. But we wish your Fraternity so to ordain the bishops in England that they be not separated one from another by a long distance, so that nothing may hinder them from assembling for an episcopal consecration. The presence of some of the pastors is very useful, and they should be able to meet easily. When by God's help you have ordained bishops in places near to each other, consecrations of bishops should not take place without the presence of three or four bishops." With regard to the relations with the bishops of Gaul, Gregory is precise as to jurisdiction. "Over the bishops of Gaul we grant you no authority, for from the ancient times of my predecessors the Bishop of Arles has received the pallium, whom we should not deprive of his acknowledged authority. If it happen that your Fraternity journeys into Gaul, you should act in unison with the Bishop of Arles, so that any fault amongst bishops may be corrected, and if he

[1] Ep. xiv 17.

should grow lax in discipline it may be re-kindled by the zeal of your Fraternity. We have written to him that, when your Holiness is in Gaul, he should pay every attention to your suggestions, so that you may repress in the conduct of bishops whatever contravenes the law of our Creator. Of your own authority you cannot adjudicate on the bishops of Gaul, but by persuasion, by kindness and by the display of good works for their imitation, strive to bring back the minds of the perverse to a desire of holiness. . . . But with respect to acts of authority you will communicate with the aforesaid Bishop of Arles, so that nothing may be neglected which is required by the statutes of the fathers. All the bishops of Britain, however, we commit to your Fraternity, to instruct the unlearned, to strengthen the weak by exhortation, and correct the perverse by authority."[1]

By the new messengers Gregory sent all things in general that were necessary "for worship and the service of the church, viz., sacred vessels and vestments for the altars, also ornaments for the churches, and vestments for priests and clerics, as likewise relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, besides many books."[2] He also sent Augustine the pallium, and provided for a regular hierarchy. "Since the new church of the English has been brought to the grace of the Almighty God by his assistance and your labours, we grant to you the use of the pallium, to be worn only during the solemnities of the Mass, so that you ordain twelve bishops in several places who shall be subject to your jurisdiction, and the Bishop of the City of London shall in future be consecrated by his own synod, and

[1] Ep. xi 64. [2] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* i 29.

receive the pallium of honour from this Apostolic See, which, by the help of God, I serve. We wish you to send a bishop to the city of York, one whom you shall deem worthy of consecration, so that, when the same city and the surrounding country shall have received the word of God, he shall consecrate twelve bishops and enjoy the honour of a metropolitan, and to him, too, if we live, we propose to give the pallium by the help of the Lord. We wish him, however, to be subject to the jurisdiction of your Fraternity. After your death he shall preside over the bishops that he consecrates, so that he shall no longer be subject to the Bishop of London. Between the bishops of the cities of London and York this distinction of honour shall in future hold, that he take precedence who was consecrated first. Let whatever is to be done for the zeal of Christ be arranged with common counsel and united action: let all unanimously determine rightly, and fulfil what they determine without differing one from another. Your Fraternity shall have jurisdiction not only over the bishops you ordain, nor only over those ordained by the Bishop of York, but by the authority of our Lord God over all the bishops of Britain, so that from the mouth and life of your Holiness they may receive a model of believing rightly and living well, and fulfilling their office with faith and observance may attain, when God wills, the heavenly kingdom. May God keep you in safety, most reverend brother."[1] London and York were the metropolitan sees in the British Church, and on Augustine's representing to Gregory that Canterbury

[1] Ep. xi 65.

was the capital of Ethelbert's kingdom, he transferred the primacy to the royal city.

Thus Gregory arranged for the settlement, establishment, and continuance of the English Church. It was Venerable Bede who gave him the title of Apostle of the English, "for we may, and ought rightly to call him an apostle, because, while he exercised the pontificate over all the world, and was placed over the churches already reduced to the faith of truth, he made our nation—till then given up to the servitude of idols—the Church of Christ, so that it is allowable for us to give him that title of apostle, for though he is not an apostle to others, yet he is so to us; for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord."[1] In desire, in attempt, in direction, Gregory was the Apostle of the English. But for an accident, or rather an overruling Providence destining him for other work, his own feet would have trodden our English counties, and his own lips would have proclaimed the gospel of peace to our Saxon forefathers. The desire and the purpose were permanent, for few acts of his pontificate manifest a fixed determination more clearly than the mission for the conversion of the Saxons. For the work he selected his own brethren, his companions and associates from his own monastery, whom he knew thoroughly and who knew him. He could not go himself, so he sent those who were dearest to him. When they were disheartened and frightened, he encouraged, exhorted, insisted; he watched over their progress, smoothed their way, and provided assistance and protection for them. When success crowned

[1] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* ii 1.

their efforts he rejoiced with them, sent them help, directed them, and provided for the continuance and permanence of their work. His mind initiated the mission, his authority set it in motion, his hand guided it, his eye followed it, his energy pressed it on, his heart gave it life, his judgement consolidated it, and thus in all but his presence the English are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord.

CHAPTER XIV

SPAIN AND AFRICA

Towards the end of the sixth century two races occupied the Spanish peninsula, the Sueves and the Visigoths, both of whom professed Arianism. In the north-east, the Sueves had recently yielded to the preaching and labours of Abbot Martin of Dumas, afterwards Bishop of Braga, and had returned to Catholic unity. The Visigoths in the south, under their King Leovigild, still held Arian doctrines, and resisted every effort at conversion until the time of St Leander. A man of undoubted talent and brilliant prospects, for Leovigild had married his sister, Leander gave up all for a monk's cell in a monastery at Seville. There he remained in seclusion, and there he opened a school, to which the chief nobility sent their children to be brought up under his charge, and among his pupils he numbered his two royal nephews, Hermenigild and Reccared. He gained the confidence and the heart of Hermenigild the eldest, and received him into Catholic unity, and his fidelity to the teaching of the faith was strengthened by an alliance with a Catholic princess, Ingonde, the daughter of Queen Brunehalt. Leovigild associated Hermenigild with him in the government, and removing the Capital to Toledo, left his son in authority at Seville.

Leovigild declared war against the Catholic Sueves, and after he had conquered them, he determined to

force them by persecution and tortures to give up the Catholic faith which they had so recently adopted. The taste for tyranny led him to extend his persecutions to his own Catholic subjects; he banished the Catholic bishops, imprisoned Catholic nobles, and mercilessly subjected Catholics to torments. Hermenigild clung firmly to the faith in spite of the threats of his father, who thereupon did not hesitate to involve the country in an unnatural war between father and son. In the emergency Hermenigild sent Leander to Constantinople to enlist the sympathy if not the assistance of the Emperor. There he met Gregory, and the kindred spirits, naturally drawn to each other, maintained an affectionate intercourse through life. They were frequently together in the imperial city, and Gregory listened to the story of the troubles and dangers of the Church in Spain, and through the heart of his friend he learned to endure and to hope for Spain. Meanwhile Leovigild laid siege to Seville, captured Hermenigild, and cast him into prison. Neither dungeon nor disgrace, neither threats nor promises, could shake the constancy of the faithful prince, who resolutely declared his intention to yield life rather than faith. He was peremptorily ordered to receive communion from the hands of an Arian bishop. On his refusal the unnatural father, to the horror of the people, slew him in prison on Easter Eve, 586.

The persecution continued with unabated violence for two years more, and then Leovigild was seized with a mortal disease. With the terrors of death came remorse, his ill deeds filling his soul with dismay. He issued orders for the recall of Leander, and

on his death-bed conjured his son Reccared to embrace the Catholic faith and to make reparation for the injuries of his father's wicked career. At his accession Reccared nobly fulfilled his promise. By the assistance of Leander he sent preachers throughout the country, and without any compulsion he brought the whole nation back to the unity of the faith. At a great council of the nation held at Toledo in 589 in the presence of seventy-eight bishops, Reccared publicly proclaimed the abjuration of heresy by the joint nation of the Sueves and Visigoths. He made a profession of faith, in which he was joined by eight Arian bishops, the nobility, and the whole people. Leander announced to Gregory the joyful tidings of the complete conversion of king and people. In the first year of his pontificate Gregory writes to Leander in terms of affectionate friendship, and thus speaks of the welcome intelligence: "I cannot find words to express my delight at learning that our common son, the most glorious King Reccared, has been so thoroughly converted to the Catholic faith. What your letter tells me of his character has made me love one whom I do not know. But since you well know the wiles of the old enemy, who attacks victors with more persistence, your Holiness will now watch over him more sedulously, so that he may complete what he has so well begun, and will not allow him to exalt himself as perfect in good works, so that he may combine merit of life with the faith that is now known to him. Make clear to him that he becomes a citizen of the eternal kingdom by works, so that after the course of many years he may pass from kingdom to kingdom."

The letter is another instance of the humble saint fearing the dangers of pride in success. Leander had consulted him about the threefold immersion at baptism, and in the same letter Gregory gives an interesting reply. "The threefold immersion at baptism cannot be explained more fittingly than by your own exposition, for in different customs of Holy Church there is nothing at variance with the one faith. In putting the infant three times into the water we present a symbol of the three days' burial, and in taking it out we signify the resurrection after three days. Should anyone consider that it is done out of reverence for the Blessed Trinity, the single immersion is in no way opposed to this, for since there are three subsistences in one substance, it would not be wrong to immerse the infant three times or once, when in three immersions the trinity of persons is signified, and in the one the unity of the godhead. But since at the present day the infant is immersed three times by heretics, I think it ought not to be done by you, lest in numbering the immersions they divide the godhead, and in continuing their own practice they boast that they have changed our custom."[1]

Reccared was anxious to correspond directly with Gregory, and arranged a special embassy to carry his homage to the feet of the Pontiff. In his desire to please the monk-pope he selected abbots to represent him, and furnished them with costly presents, but in a storm off Marseilles they lost everything except their lives, and returned to Spain. Reccared took advantage of another messenger to send a gold chalice to the Pope with a letter, written in terms of affection

[1] Ep. i 43.

and respect, but in poor Latin. "For I beg your Highness," he says, "to take the opportunity to send us your golden letters. I do not believe that how much I love you can be hidden from your Highness, for God reveals the abundance of the heart. Sometimes it happens that the grace of Christ unites even sensibly those who are separated by distance of lands or seas, for fame has made your goodness known to those who do not see you with their eyes. With all respect I commend in Christ to your Holiness, Leander, Bishop of Seville, for through him your goodness is made evident to us, and when with the same bishop we talk of your life, your good actions make us think but little of ourselves. I always rejoice to hear of your welfare, most reverend and most holy man, and I ask the prudence of your Christianity frequently by your prayers to commend to our common Lord myself and the people who, under God, are subject to my rule, and who have been acquired to Christ in your time, so that this charity may strengthen in the true service of God those who are divided by the breadth of the globe."[1]

Gregory in a lengthy reply reciprocates the charity and good feeling: "I cannot express in words, most Excellent son, how pleased I am with your work and your life. When I heard that, by virtue of a new miracle in our own days and by means of your Excellence, the whole Gothic nation has passed from the error of the Arian heresy to the solidity of the true faith, I could but exclaim with the Prophet, *This is the change of the right hand of the Most High.*[2] At the sight of so great a work what stony heart would

[1] Ep. ix 61. [2] Ps. lxxvi 11.

not at once soften in praise of Almighty God and love of your Excellence? I acknowledge freely that I have often spoken about you with my friends who are living with me, and I often take pleasure in admiring with them all that you have done. I sometimes bring it up against myself, that I, sluggish and useless, am torpid in listless ease, while kings toil for multitudes of souls for the gain of the heavenly country. What, therefore, shall I say to the coming Judge in his terrible judgement, if I shall appear empty-handed there, where your Excellence shall lead after you flocks of the faithful, whom you have now drawn to the grace of the true faith by assiduous and continuous preaching? But in this gift of God I have this great consolation—that the holy work which is not mine I love in you, and when I rejoice with great exultation in your deeds, what is yours by labour becomes mine by charity. For the conversion of the Goths by your labour, in our exultation we exclaim with the angels: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." He thanks him for the presents, praises him for refusing a large sum of money offered by the Jews to evade one of his laws, and eloquently warns him to preserve "humility of heart and purity of body." He adds a few principles of government: "The guidance of a kingdom should be tempered with great moderation towards subjects, lest power corrupt the mind, for then truly is a kingdom governed well when the glory of governing does not dominate the soul. Take care not to let anger creep in, nor to do too quickly what may be lawful. For when anger is required for the faults of delinquents, it ought not to go before the mind as a mistress, but

to accompany it as a handmaid, following behind reason, so that it may be summoned into its presence. For if it once begin to possess the mind, what is done with cruelty will be thought just." He sends him with the letter some relics as presents.[1]

This letter was conveyed by the Abbot Cyriacus, who, after his mission in Gaul, passed into Spain for a similar object. At a council held at Barcelona in 597 two canons contain enactments against simony and the intrusion of laymen into ecclesiastical offices. Gregory also sent the pallium to Leander by Cyriacus.

Later, Gregory sent John the Defensor into Spain to investigate the cases of Januarius, Bishop of Malaga, and Stephen, another bishop, who were reported to have been unjustly deprived of their sees. Gregory gave him minute instructions as to procedure, and enclosed lengthy extracts from all the laws bearing on the question. This letter illustrates the patient care that Gregory bestowed on judicial proceedings, which may be gathered from one extract: "Diligently inquire first whether the trial was orderly conducted, and whether the accusers and witnesses were distinct persons. Then examine into the quality of the case, whether it involved exile or deprivation. Then whether the testimony against him was given in his presence under oath, whether it was recorded in writing, and whether he had permission to reply and defend himself. Also inquire thoroughly into the persons of the accusers and witnesses, their condition and reputation, whether they are needy or had any enmity against the aforesaid bishop, and whether their testimony is hearsay, or they spoke definitely from

[1] Ep. ix 122.

their own knowledge. Also whether the judgement was in writing, and the sentence read over to the parties in their presence. If the cause has not been conducted in due form, or does not come under exile or deposition, let him by all means be restored to his church." He then prescribes the various penalties against false accusers and witnesses in the different eventualities.[1] The care which he bestowed on his own decisions may be estimated by the pains he took to point out the procedure to his delegate.

On the opposite shores of the Mediterranean, through the plains and cities of North Africa, where in those days the land was populous and sees numerous, the heresy of the Donatists still infested the Church. These held that sinners neither belonged to the Church nor could be tolerated by it, and that the validity of a sacrament depended on the moral character of the minister; hence they re-baptised all who had received the sacrament from Catholic hands. For nearly three centuries, with a following greater or less, they withstood the authority of the Church: at one time close on three hundred Donatist bishops met in council. After the Vandal invasion of Africa in the fifth century they split up into sects, and at the time of Gregory, although diminished in number, they still caused much anxiety and annoyance. With customary energy the great Pontiff at once took measures to repress their activity, and to excite the vigilance of the Catholic bishops. He enlisted the interest and influence of the secular governors: in the first year of his Pontificate he wrote to Gennadius, the Exarch of Africa: "Even as the Lord has made your

[1] Ep. xiii 45.

Excellence illustrious in the world by the brilliancy of your victories in active warfare, so should you also attack the enemies of the Church with alacrity of mind and body, thus your fame will shine forth with a double triumph when, on the one hand, you strenuously resist the adversaries of the Church in public warfare for the Christian people, and, on the other, you valiantly fight ecclesiastical battles as a soldier of the Lord. It is well known that the followers of the heretical religion, if, which God forbid, opportunity of doing harm is given to them, actively rise up against the Catholic faith, so as to spread the poison of heresy, and corrupt, if possible, the members of the Christian body. For we know that they stiffen their necks in opposition to the Lord against the Catholic Church, and strive to bring dishonour on the faith of the Christian name. But your Excellence will repress their efforts, and bend their proud necks under the yoke of righteousness."[1]

Three years later he writes to Pantaleon the Prefect: "How strictly the law prosecutes the wickedness of heretics is not unknown to your Excellence. It is no slight fault, therefore, if in your time those whom the integrity of our faith and the severity of earthly law alike condemn, should obtain liberty to grow up again. In your territory, as we have learnt, the boldness of the Donatists has increased to such an extent, that with pestiferous authority they not only cast out from their churches the priests of the Catholic faith, but any whom the water of baptism has regenerated in the true faith they do not hesitate to rebaptise. We are very much astonished if this be so, and that in

[1] Ep. i 74.

your position you permit wicked men to commit excesses of this kind. First, consider what judgement you allow men to pass upon you, if those who in former times were repressed with just reason, under your administration find a way of perpetrating their excesses. Then remember that our God will require the souls of the lost from your hands, if you neglect to correct this great crime as far as ever it is possible. Do not, your Excellence, take offence at this, for since we love you as our own children, we do not hesitate to indicate to you what is to your advantage."[1]

Speaking thus to secular governors in no mincing terms, Gregory was still more explicit with the bishops. Maximinian, Bishop of Pudentiana, was reported to have taken a bribe from the Donatists, and allowed one of their bishops to be consecrated in his city. Gregory writes to Bishop Columbus, ordering him to assemble a council, to investigate the matter thoroughly, and if they found that Maximinian was guilty, to degrade him as a warning to others. He continues: "We learn from the report of the bearer of this that on account of our sins the Donatist heresy spreads daily, and that for a bribe license is given for very many to be baptised again by the Donatists after Catholic baptism. What a serious thing this is, brother, we ought to consider with all earnestness of mind. Behold, the wolf does not secretly at night tear to pieces the flock of the Lord, but in open daylight we actually see him prowling about for the slaughter of the sheep, and we resist him with no solicitude, with no weapons of words. What gain of an increased flock can we show to the Lord, if we look on with

[1] Ep. iv 34.

indifference while we see those whom we have undertaken to feed, devoured by the wild beast? Let us strive, therefore, to stimulate our hearts by the example of earthly shepherds, who often pass winter nights in watching amidst rain and frost, lest even one sheep—and that, perhaps, a useless one—perish. If the lurking animal shall have bitten it with his voracious teeth, what trouble do they not take, with what anxiety of heart they cry out, what shouts they utter in the imminent danger to protect the rest of the flock, lest the master thereof should exact from them what is lost by carelessness? Let us be ever watchful then lest any perish, and if by chance even one shall have been seized, let us call it back to the Lord's flock by the voice of the divine Word, so that he who is the Shepherd of shepherds may be satisfied in his judgement that we have watched over his fold."[1]

To secure united action, and to maintain constant vigilance, Gregory urged the bishops to meet in the various provinces. Two years later he writes a joint letter to Bishops Victor and Columbus: "We learn that the exertions of the heretics so disturb the flock of the Lord in your district that it might as well have no pastor to rule it. It has been reported to us that many, as we grieve to hear, have already been lacerated by the poison of their teeth. In fine, that with the greatest daring they have expelled Catholic priests from their churches, and with shameless wickedness have inflicted death by rebaptising those to whom the water of regeneration had given salvation. All this has saddened our soul exceedingly, the more so

[1] Ep. ii 48.

because in your position you have allowed so great a crime to be perpetrated with unpunished presumption. Wherefore we exhort your Fraternity by this letter, after discussion in a united council, eagerly and strenuously to check the disease in its birth, so that it may not gain by neglect, nor give rise to the ravages of pestilence in the flock committed to you. . . . Considering this, therefore, with sedulous prayer and with every possible effort, delay not to resist this sacrilegious wickedness, so that a future messenger, by the help of Christ's grace, may rejoice our heart more by their punishment than it has been grieved by their excess."[1]

The councils were held, and the united action checked the progress of the heresy, for in the next year Gregory praises Dominic of Carthage for his zeal, and endeavours to soften down the severity of the canonical decrees: "Your delegate Prosper, the bearer of this, came to us, and after the other greetings of your Charity in your letter to us, he delivered the document containing the chief enactments of the Synod held by you. After reading them, we congratulate you on your pastoral zeal, and we have dispelled the calumnies which worthless persons had conveyed to the most Pious Lords to the detriment of religion. We congratulate you chiefly because your Fraternity has striven to preserve the African province, so that no one should neglect to repress with priestly fervour the erring sects of heretics. In procuring a quiet settlement, before your Charity consulted us by letter, we remember that we explained the matter so thoroughly that we think it unnecessary

[1] Ep. iv 35.

to repeat it to you again. However this may turn out, we desire that all heretics should be repressed with vigour and reason by Catholic priests; yet, looking into it more closely, it strikes us that what you have done may give scandal, which the Lord avert, to the presidents of other councils. For a sentence is promulgated by you at the end of the acts, in which, while you make provision for the examination of heretics, you insist that those who neglect it should be punished by the deprivation of their possessions and dignities. It is best, therefore, dearest brother, in external correction to preserve in the first place internal charity, and to bow to the opinion of those of inferior dignity, which we think also is becoming to your position. For you will then resist more easily the errors of heretics with all your united strength, when in a priestly manner you strive to preserve internally ecclesiastical concord."[1] Beyond an allusion in the next year, 596, there is no further reference to the Donatists in any of the subsequent letters to Africa, and from this silence it may be gathered that Gregory successfully repressed the heresy.

By a peculiar custom of the African Church the metropolitan or primate did not occupy the chief or any particular see, but on a vacancy the senior bishop without election became primate, so that the dignity sometimes fell to an obscure town. Gregory was anxious to change this custom to the ordinary law of the Church: "He is made Primate from the order of his position, putting aside merit of life, for it is not the higher dignity but the actions of a better life that God approves. Let the Primate himself reside,

[1] Ep. v 5.

not at different towns in turn according to the custom, but in one city always according to his election."[1] The African bishops were much opposed to any change, and petitioned to be allowed to continue their custom. The Pontiff did not insist on his own opinion, and wrote a circular letter to all the bishops of Numidia: "You have petitioned from our predecessor of blessed memory through Hilary our notary, that all the customs of previous times should be retained, which long usage has preserved from the beginning by the ordinance of blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. In accordance with the tenor of your report, and since it is acknowledged not to be opposed to Catholic faith, we grant that the custom shall remain unchanged, whether for constituting the Primate or for other matters, except that we forbid those to be advanced to the Primacy who, having once been Donatists, are raised to the Episcopate, even although the clerics shall propose them for the position. It will be sufficient for them to have care of the people committed to them, and not to allow them, through the pre-eminence of the Primacy, to rank before those bishops whom the Catholic faith has always instructed, and who have been brought up in the bosom of the Church. Do you, therefore, dearest brothers, forestall our admonitions by the zeal of charity in the Lord, knowing that the strict Judge will arraign all that we do for examination, and will commend each one of us, not for the prerogative of higher dignity, but for the merit of our works. I beseech you, then, to love one another in Christ with mutual peace, and to resist heretics and enemies of

[1] Ep. i 74.

the Church with one impulse of the heart. Be solicitous for the souls of others; draw all you can to the faith by the preaching of charity, setting forth even the terrors of the Divine Judgement as you have been appointed pastors, for so the Lord expects the profit of an increased flock from those pastors to whom he has committed it. If he sees an increase in his flock by practice of greater diligence, he will certainly enrich you with increased gifts in the heavenly kingdom."[1]

Gregory displayed the same anxiety and vigilance to obtain worthy pastors in Africa that engaged his solicitude in Italy and Gaul. He writes to Bishop Columbus: "I am well aware that you cling and are devoted to this Apostolic See with your whole mind, your whole heart, and whole soul, and it was clearly evident before your letter produced its testimony. Not in the formal words of civility, but in real charity, I exhort you never to cease to be mindful of what you have promised to blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Be attentive to the Primate of your Synod, so that boys may never be admitted to sacred orders lest they fall the more irretrievably the more quickly they are promoted to higher dignities. Let there be no bribery in ordinations; let the influence or importunity of individuals avail nothing against what we prohibit. For without doubt God is offended when anyone is raised to sacred orders not by merit but by favour, or, which God forbid, by bribery. Be not silent if you know that these things take place, but immediately resist; for if you neglect to investigate, or if you conceal what you know, not only will

[1] Ep. i 77.

the fetters of sin bind those who do this, but no slight fault will attach to you before God. He who does such things should be coerced by canonical punishment, lest from the sins of others such great guilt receive strength from dissimulation."[1] A letter in similar terms is addressed to the primate Adeodatus.

To Dominic of Carthage Gregory expressed his reverence for his fellow-bishops, and intimates that in exacting discipline he intends no depreciation of their dignity. "Without any hesitation hold to the ecclesiastical privileges about which your Fraternity writes, for as we defend our own so we preserve the rights of every church. For sake of favour I grant to no one more than is his due, nor from the suggestion of ambition do I derogate from what is his right, for I desire in all things to honour my brethren, and strive to establish each one in honour, provided that it is not opposed to another's right. I am very pleased with the character of your delegates, by which you show how much you love me in sending me such eligible brothers and sons."[2]

His argus eyes picked out matters of discipline in Africa equally with other regions, and with the same insistence he corrected abuses. Sickness compelled a priest named Adeodatus to be away from his church, and Bishop Quintianus took advantage of his absence to appoint another in his place. Gregory ordered the Primate to inquire into the matter: "And if, as stated, you shall find that the cause why he left his church is manifest illness, you will not permit the ordination of another priest to prejudice him, but without any hesitation see that he is restored to his

[1] Ep. iii 48. [2] Ep. ii 47.

church."[1] He orders a bishop to be restored to his see, and thus writes to Victor and Columbus: "The complaint of our brother and fellow-bishop Cresconius has reached us, namely, that without any fault or decision of a council the parochial churches to which he was appointed have been without due reason occupied for nearly fifteen years by our brother and fellow-bishop Valentio, and moreover, which we grieve to mention, that he has alienated at his own will the goods of his predecessor. If this is true, I cannot say how wicked, how execrable it is, especially in a religious matter. In this affair there ought to be no gentleness or delay, and we admonish your Fraternity by this letter diligently to inquire into it. If his open complaint is substantiated, your Goodness will, without delay, provide for the restitution of the goods taken, and of the occupied parishes, so that in justice he may receive all without excuse through your assistance. And let him not be put to the trouble of demanding, nor let the occupier acquire any gain by his injury. Let the zeal of equity and the uprightness of justice rouse you to action."[2]

Paulinus, Bishop of Tegasis, greatly harassed his subjects, inflicting corporal punishment on them, and was reported to be guilty of simony. Gregory wrote to the Primate and to Bishop Columbus, ordering them to convene a synod to pass sentence upon him.[3] Sometimes Gregory made a mistake, and he does not hesitate to acknowledge it. He writes to Columbus: "We indicate to your Holiness that a certain man named Peter came to us, asserted that he was a bishop, and demanded from us redress for his cause. At first

[1] Ep. iv 13. [2] Ep. viii 28. [3] Ep. xii 28, 29.

he told us a story that excited our pity, but afterwards, on examining him, we found that what he said was far from true, and his action grieved us exceedingly." He adds that he could not go thoroughly into the case at that distance from the scene, and sends him back for the judgement of Columbus.[1]

Gregory was placed in some perplexity in the case of Crementius, the Primate of Byzacium, a remote province of Africa, whom his fellow-bishops accused of some crime. The case was referred to the Holy See, but Gregory was not informed of the particulars, and thus writes to John of Syracuse: "Your Holiness does not thoroughly understand the question at issue. The Primate of Byzacium was accused of some crime, and the most Pious Emperor wished him to be judged by us according to the canons. But Theodore, the General, received a bribe of ten pounds of gold, and prevented the cause from proceeding. Then the most Pious Emperor asked us to send a delegate to do what the canons required, but, knowing the fickleness of men, we were reluctant to settle the case. The Primate now speaks on his own behalf, and it is very doubtful whether he speaks truly and sincerely, for, when accused by his fellow-bishops, he now says to us that he is subject to the Apostolic See. When a bishop is in fault, I know not what bishop is not subject to it. When there is no fault all are equal, according to the dictates of humility. However, say what you consider most advisable to the aforesaid most eloquent Martin. Take counsel with him about what should be done, for we have briefly written to him about the case, and we ought not to

[1] Ep. vi 37.

credit unknown men promiscuously."[1] In the letter to Martin, the scholastic, he tells him to see and consult with John of Syracuse, and mentions that he has not been informed of the details of the case: "This, however, altogether displeases me, that some of the bishops went to the meeting without any citation from their Primate, and took part in an illicit convention. But because, as we have said, the origin and nature of the case is entirely unknown to us, we cannot pronounce anything definitely, lest, which would be too reprehensible, we seem to issue sentence on things imperfectly known."[2] Ultimately, the case was referred to a council of the bishops of the province of Byzacium, and Gregory wrote to them urging upon them the responsibility of doing justice without favour or prejudice.[3]

Gregory did not hesitate to enlist the civil authorities in support of ecclesiastical discipline. To the Exarch Gennadius he writes: "We press on you the correction of ecclesiastical causes the more freely because we know the pious bent of your mind." He informs him that he had committed discipline to Columbus, and adds: "Wherefore, greeting you with paternal affection, we exhort your Excellence to give him the support of your assistance in what pertains to ecclesiastical correction, so that ill deeds may not be uninvestigated or go unpunished, and the evil increase in future with the greater license through being so long unnoticed."[4] The object of the intervention of the secular authority is stated in a letter to the Prefect Innocent: "Our aforesaid brother com-

[1] Ep. ix 59.
[2] Ep. ix 58.
[3] Ep. xii 32.
[4] Ep. iv 7.

plains that the African judges have committed much violence in his district, besides much else that is contrary to the tenor of the edict; also, what from his report is intolerable, that they exact double tribute. And since the correction of this evil waits for the authority of your office, we ask you to inquire into it by a thorough investigation, and so correct this as if God commanded it, for thus you will help the afflicted by the protection of justice for the reward of your own soul, and in the future may deter others from bad actions by the example of this correction."[1]

Gregory did not restrict his interest or vigilance in Africa to matters of discipline. A terrible pestilence afflicted the people, and he conveyed his sympathy and consolation to Dominic of Carthage: "We have already heard of the great pestilence that has burst over Africa, and since Italy is not free from its ravages, the greatness of our sorrow is doubled. In the midst of these evils and numberless calamities our despairing heart would sink, unless the voice of the Lord protected our weakness. Of old, the trumpet of the Gospel announced to the faithful that when the end of the world approached, pestilence, wars, and many evils that we still dread, would come to pass. When we know beforehand what we are to suffer, we ought not to be too much afflicted as if it were unknown to us. For sometimes one kind of death is lightened by reflecting on death of another kind. How many mutilations, how many cruelties have we not witnessed, to which death would be a relief and life a torment? Did not David when the option of death was offered to him decline famine and the

[1] Ep. xi 5.

sword, and choose that his people should fall by the hand of the Lord?[1] . . . Therefore, in all adversity, let us return thanks to our Creator, and trusting in his mercy patiently endure all, for we suffer much less than we deserve."[2]

When a little later Dominic himself had risen from his bed of sickness, Gregory writes to him a letter full of tenderness and brotherly affection: "The profusion of the charity of your heart is declared by the interpreter of your tongue, for you so fashion the words of your letters in kindness, that everything you write is sweet and pleasant. Hence, as we cannot embrace your Fraternity in the body, we do so with the arms of love, for what long distance denies to souls in friendship the office of charity supplies. As we are invigorated by the health of most loving brothers, so we are grieved at their sickness: we give thanks to Almighty God who has consoled our sadness by the news of recovery. Hearing that you were attacked by dangerous sickness, we remained in much sorrow until we received your letter. But when we are snatched from the danger of death it is uncertain, dearest brother, for what purpose we are preserved; let us turn the time of truce to the benefit of our souls, and, preparing the accounts for the coming Judge, let us protect our cause before him with tears and good works, that so we may deserve to obtain security for what we have done."[3]

His charitable heart melted at any distress, and he delighted to encourage charity and alms in others. He puts a word in praise of their charity in his letters to the rulers Gennadius, Pantaleon, and Innocent, and

[1] 2 Kings xxiv 14. [2] Ep. x 63. [3] Ep. xii 1.

there is extant a letter, a copy of which was written to each of three African ladies, Savanella, Columba, and Agnella, wherein he extols their charity, and begs them to increase their reward by not looking for a temporal recompense: "Wherefore do this assiduously, and in doing it seek no return on earth, for temporal things are nothing to those who aspire to heavenly things. But fix your aspirations there where whatever is gained has no end. In doing good do not fail, so that you may lay up treasure there, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not dig through nor steal."[1]

Thus in Africa, as in other regions, with untiring energy Gregory continued his routine of resisting the enemies of the Church, of exacting discipline, and of diffusing charity. By his persistence in convening synods and enforcing the law he suppressed the uprising of the Donatists, by his rigid adherence to the principles of the canons he established order amongst the bishops, and by a courteous and firm demeanour towards the civil authorities he secured their co-operation and friendship. The dealings with the Church in Africa give testimony of his grasp over every part of the Church; there, too, he was the supreme Pontiff, the representative of Peter, the vigilant shepherd, and the kind and indulgent father.

[1] Ep. xii 7.

CHAPTER XV

LITURGY AND CHANT

The name of Gregory is familiar to modern ears in connection with chant and liturgy. The old tones that have been mellowed by age and consecrated by use through succeeding centuries, come as an echo from the troop of choristers trained under the eye of the great Pontiff, and, if we may credit John the Deacon, under his rod. The public prayers of the Church, especially those that accompany the sacrifice of the Mass, are associated with his name, for although he did not compose them, he so codified and fixed them that the text in use at the present time differs but little from that of the days of Gregory.

Several liturgical books were in use in the ancient Church. The Sacramentary contained the prayers that the priest said in administering the Sacraments, and especially in celebrating the sacrifice of the Mass. It comprised not only the fixed prayers that were used at every Mass, but those that varied according to the recurring festivals and times of the year. The portions accustomed to be sung were reserved for the Antiphonary—so called because the music was sung in alternate choirs, Antiphona. The Lectionary contained the lessons or passages of Scripture that were read during divine service. The Psalter, another separate volume, contained the Psalms. The rules to be observed in carrying out the ceremonial, in

modern times called Rubrics, were collected in a book called the "Ordo." The Greeks had several books for different parts of the office, the Latins several "Ordos" for different functions—*e.g.*, Pontifical Mass, Baptism, Ordination, etc. Amongst the liturgical books in present use the Roman "Ordo" is one of the most ancient. It was called Roman not only to distinguish it from the Eastern rites, but also from those of Africa, Gaul, Spain, and Milan, which followed special "uses" of their own.

Gregory undertook to revise and fix the text of the Ritual. He took as a basis the Sacramentary of Pope Gelasius (492-496), and condensed it into one volume. He abbreviated many parts, curtailing the psalms and omitting some of the special prefaces. In the fixed portion of the Mass he changed the position of the Our Father, and added to the Canon the words, "And to dispose our days in thy peace, to preserve us from eternal damnation, and rank us in the number of thine elect." The remainder of the Ordinary and Canon he left untouched. In the variable portions he "omitted much, changed a few things, and added some,"[1] and it is evident that he shortened the service, substituting verses for entire psalms, and diminishing the number of variable prayers at the Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion. In later times the rubrics have been increased and other festivals added, but the number of prayers composing the Mass, their order, and their names have remained unchanged.

A description of one of Gregory's Stations will perhaps illustrate the surroundings of his liturgical

[1] *John the Deacon*, ii 17.

work. The churches and clergy of Rome were divided into seven districts or regions, and the clergy of each division took turns according to the day of the week to assist at the general ceremonies. The churches were of four grades—Patriarchal, Titular, Diaconal, and Oratories. The Patriarchal or basilicas appertained to the Pope, and were St John Lateran, St Peter's, St Mary Major, St Lawrence outside the walls, and Holy Cross of Jerusalem; each had a guardian to keep it in order. The titular churches were the parish churches with baptismal fonts and a district attached; each had a cardinal priest, assisted by other priests. At the time of Pope Symmachus (499) there were thirty titular churches and sixty-six priests. The diaconeries were hospitals or offices for the distribution of alms, one in each region with a church attached, and were governed by the seven regionary deacons, the chief of whom was the archdeacon. To each region were also attached a number of defensors, clerics to assist in the business of the poor and the work of the district. The oratories were private chapels in cemeteries, private houses, monasteries, and convents, and were without title, district, or public office. The sacramentary fixes the churches at which the stations were held on the days of Lent, the Ember days, and the principal festivals.

On one of these days—Easter Sunday, for instance—if the Pope pontificated, all the acolytes of the region of the day, and the defensors of all the regions, assembled early at the Lateran to escort the Pope to the church of the station, St Mary Major. Meanwhile the rest of the clergy of Rome, and usually

some bishops, went from their own districts to the church to be ready to receive him. The Pope and his chief officials rode on horseback, the acolytes and defensors accompanied him on foot, carrying the books and vessels necessary for the sacrifice. At the arrival of the Pontiff the deacons assisted him to dismount from his horse, and conducted him to the sacristy, at the door of which the deacons put on their robes. The deacon of the Mass took the book of the Gospels in its case, broke the seal, extracted the roll, marked the place, and a sub-deacon reverentially placed it on the altar. Meanwhile the sub-deacons vested the Pontiff with alb, girdle, amice, linen dalmatic, the grand dalmatic, and, lastly, the chasuble. A deacon put on the pallium, a regionary sub-deacon presented the maniple, saying: "Such a one will read the epistle; such a one will sing," and at a sign from the Pope went to the door of the sacristy and cried, "Light up."

The cantor in the choir began the antiphon of the Introit with the entire psalm. At the commencement of the singing the Pope left the sacristy, supported on his right by the archdeacon and on his left by the deacon, and was preceded by incense and seven acolytes bearing torches. On the way he paid reverence to a particle of a consecrated host reserved from a previous Mass and presented to him as he passed. On arriving at the altar the Pope made a sign to sing the "Gloria Patri" and finish the psalm. The deacons kissed the sides of the altar, and the Pope having prayed for a moment, asking forgiveness for his sins, kissed the book of the Gospels and the middle of the altar, and mounted his seat, before which he

remained standing with his face to the apse and back to the people, the seat being behind the altar. The Kyrie was then sung, after which the Pope turned towards the people, intoned the Gloria in Excelsis, and immediately resumed his former position until its conclusion. The Pope again faced the people, saying, "Peace be with you," turned to the apse, and said at his seat the Collect for the day, after which he sat down with his face towards the people, and gave a sign for others to sit. They formed a semi-circle enclosing the altar, the bishops to the right, the priests to the left.

When all were seated, the sub-deacon mounted an ambo at the side of the choir to read the Epistle. The ambo was a small pulpit or desk raised on steps: in ancient churches three have been found, on the right, one for the epistle turned towards the altar, and one for the prophecies turned towards the people, and a third on the left more elevated and more ornamented for the Gospel. After the Epistle the cantor mounted the ambo with his antiphonary to sing the responsory that is now called the Gradual, from the "gradus" or steps of the ambo: he added the Alleluia, or Tract, according to the time of year. The deacon then came to the Pope, kissed his foot, received his blessing, went to the altar, and, kissing the book of the Gospels, took it to the ambo, accompanied by two sub-deacons, one bearing incense, and two acolytes carrying candles. He mounted the ambo alone, and read the Gospel facing the south towards the men, the women being ranged on the north side. At its conclusion, the sub-deacon took the book to be kissed by all, rolled it up, put it in its case, and sealed it.

Since the Roman Church had never been infected with heresy the Credo was not said, but if the Pope preached, as Gregory frequently did, the sermon took place after the Gospel: it was here that Gregory delivered the forty homilies on the Gospels that have come down to us. The Pope saluted the people, saying, "The Lord be with you," and the deacon went to the altar and spread over it the corporal, a large linen cloth that covered the whole altar. The Pontiff then descended from his seat to receive the offerings of bread and wine, not for consecration but for oblation. Accompanied by the chief defensor and notary, by the sub-deacon with a cloth to hold the bread, and by the archdeacon with a chalice, the Pope went to the men's side to those of senatorial rank, and received from each a piece of bread, circular in shape and prepared at their homes, and the archdeacon poured their wine into the chalice, which, when full, was emptied into a larger vessel borne by an acolyte. The Pope went over to the women of senatorial rank and received their offerings. Meanwhile another priest received the offerings of the rest of the faithful. The Pontiff returned to his seat and washed his hands, while the archdeacon placed on the altar as much of the bread as he thought sufficient for the communion of the people. He took from the sub-deacon the cruet of the Pope and poured the wine through a strainer into the chalice. A sub-deacon went to the choir and received from the cantor a phial of water, which the archdeacon also poured into the chalice in the form of a cross. The Pontiff then left his seat, came to the altar and received the offerings of the priests and deacons, and lastly his own from the arch-

deacon. Thus all offered—people, clergy, and Pope. The archdeacon placed the chalice with two handles on the altar next to the host of the Pope. During the offering the choir sang the Offertory—an entire psalm with its antiphon.

At its conclusion, the Pope, standing with his face towards the people, the altar being between him and them, with the bishops, priests, and deacons behind him, said, in a low voice, the prayer over the offerings called the Secret; after which he intoned and sang the Preface and waited till the choir had finished the Sanctus. Then, in a low voice, without interruption, he said the prayer of the Canon, which is word for word the same as is now said, and as found in the Sacramentary of Gregory. There was no Elevation as at the present day, but at the end of the Canon the archdeacon took the chalice by the handles and raised it before the Pope, who touched it with the hosts. The *Pater Noster* and accompanying prayer, *Libera nos*, followed, both being said by the Pope. With the words "the peace of the Lord be with you always," he made the sign of the cross three times with his hand over the chalice, and placed it near the host and the particle consecrated at the previous Mass. Then followed the kiss of peace: the Pope kissed the archdeacon, who did the same to the next in rank, and so through all the clergy: it was continued through the people by the men separately on one side, and the women on the other.

After the kiss of peace came the fraction of the hosts. The Pope took one of the hosts, broke it, and placed one portion on the altar, and the other with the remainder of the hosts on the paten, and returned

to his seat. The archdeacon took the chalice to the corner of the altar, and gave it to the sub-deacon to hold, placed the other hosts in bags to be taken to the other bishops and priests to break them, and cleared the altar of all except the particle broken by the Pope. The choir commenced the Agnus Dei, and the deacon carried the broken hosts to the Pope, who communicated standing before his seat. From the host that he received, he placed a particle in the chalice, and also put in the particle reserved from the previous Mass. He then received some of the sacred blood from the chalice, and poured a portion of it into a vessel of wine for the communion of the people. The clergy came in succession to receive the consecrated host from the hands of the Pope, the archdeacon communicating the chalice, after which he emptied the remainder into the vessel of wine, and gave the chalice to the sub-deacon to be cleansed.

The Pontiff left his seat to communicate those of senatorial rank, the archdeacon carrying the vessel of wine into which the consecrated wine had been poured, which the people received through a golden reed. Other bishops and priests gave communion to the rest of the people, the deacons administering the wine to the men first, and then to the women. Meanwhile the choir sang the Communion, an entire psalm with its antiphon. The Pope returned to his seat and communicated the minor clergy, after which he came to the altar, saluted the people with "The Lord be with you," and said the last prayer, called the "Post Communion," which finished the Mass. A deacon announced the conclusion to the people, telling

them to depart: *Ite, missa est.* The Pope descended from his seat, giving his blessing as he passed along, and, preceded by incense and seven torchbearers, went to the sacristy and unvested.

The above description substantially represents the ceremonial of the chief act of religion as observed by Gregory. Exception is taken to individual details by the learned, according to their different views of the old Roman Ordo, but it suffices to give the general character of the ceremony for which Gregory revised the prayers, for any inaccuracy of detail does not affect the leading features of the ceremonial. The modifications introduced by him did not remain unchallenged, for he writes to John of Syracuse in reference to complaints about the innovations: "A man from Sicily told me that some of his friends—whether Greek or Latin I do not know—under pretence of zeal for the holy Roman Church, murmur against my arrangements, saying: 'How can he manage to restrain the Church of Constantinople when he continually adopts its customs?' When I asked, 'What customs do we adopt?' he replied, 'You have introduced Alleluia after the time of Pentecost; made the sub-deacons appear without their vestments; inserted the "Kyrie Eleison," and ordered the "Lord's Prayer" to be said immediately after the Canon.' I replied to them that in none of these things had we followed another Church.

"The way that we say Alleluia here comes from the tradition of blessed Jerome, taken from the Church of Jerusalem at the time of Pope Damasus, of happy memory, and therefore in this we have rather cast aside the custom which had since been introduced here

from the Greeks. I made the sub-deacons appear without vestments from the ancient custom of the Church; for it pleased one of our Pontiffs, I do not know which, to order them to appear vested. Has your Church received no tradition from the Greeks? How is it that at this day the sub-deacons appear with a linen tunic, unless they received it from their mother, the Roman Church?

"We have not said, nor do we say, the 'Kyrie Eleison' as the Greeks say it, for amongst the Greeks all say it together, while with us the clergy and the people say it alternately; and 'Christe Eleison' is repeated the same number of times, which is not done by the Greeks. In the daily Mass we leave out some things that they are accustomed to say, and we only say 'Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison' to occupy a little longer space at that time of the prayer. We say the 'Lord's Prayer' immediately after the prayer of the Canon, because the custom of the Apostles was to consecrate the host of oblation at that prayer only. And it seems to me very incongruous that we should say over the oblation a prayer composed by a scholastic, and should not say over his body and blood the actual prayer delivered and composed by our Redeemer. Among the Greeks the Lord's Prayer is said by all the people, but with us by the priest only. In what, then, have we followed Greek customs, when we have either restored our own ancient ones, or appointed what is new and useful, in which we have not been shown to have imitated others? When your Charity shall have an opportunity of going to Catania or Syracuse, in conversation instruct those whom you believe or know to have murmured about

this, and do not fail to enlighten them on any other occasion. About what they say of the Church of Constantinople, who doubts that it is subject to the Apostolic See, which our most pious Lord, the Emperor, and our brother, the Bishop of that city, constantly acknowledge? But if this or any other church has anything good, as I prohibit my inferiors from illicit things, so I am prepared to imitate them in what is good. For it is foolish in one who has pre-eminence to decline to learn what he sees is good."[1]

This letter has given rise to much controversy amongst specialists in liturgical lore. By the assertion that the Apostles used only the Lord's Prayer at the consecration, Gregory probably intended to signify that it was the only prayer they used in addition to the prayer of consecration, for he could not have meant that the words of consecration were composed by a scholastic. The position from which Gregory removed the Lord's Prayer has been also a matter of contention. Some light is thrown on the question by comparison with other liturgies, both Eastern and Western. In some of the Eastern rites it precedes, and in others it follows the fraction of the host: in the Western rites that differ from the Roman —*i.e.*, the Mozarabic, the old Gallican, and the Milanese—it follows the fraction and the pax. In the oldest Roman Ordos, as in Gregory's Sacramentary, there are no preparatory prayers between the fraction of the host and the communion, and it would seem as if the hiatus was caused by Gregory removing the Lord's Prayer from that place, especially

[1] Ep. ix 12.

as it occurs there in the other Western rites as a preparation for Communion.[1]

Gregory's Sacramentary contains not only the prayers for the Mass throughout the year, but also the prayers used for dedicating a church, for blessing the linen and sacred vessels, for the consecration of a virgin, abbess, and abbot, for ordinations, for administering extreme unction, for blessing holy water, and other blessings. Besides the Sacramentary, another liturgical book, the Antiphonary, revised by Gregory, has come down to us. It contains the parts of the Mass that were sung, and which varied

[1] The following table will illustrate the change made by Gregory:

Order before Gregory's time.	*Order fixed by Gregory.*
Canon.	Canon.
Pax and fraction of the host.	Lord's Prayer and *Libera nos.*
Lord's Prayer and *Libera nos.*	Pax and fraction of the host.
Haec Commixtio and Communion.	*Haec Commixtio* and Communion.

The term *mox post precem*, used by Gregory, would also imply that it was already after the prayer, but that he placed it *immediately* after it. Dr. Neale has some pertinent remarks in his *Introduction to the History of the Eastern Church*. "The position of the (Lord's) prayer, however, varies in different offices, inasmuch as in some it precedes, and in others it follows, the fraction of the host. It precedes in the Roman Liturgy, in the office of St Chrysostom, St Basil the Armenian, St James, St Mark; it follows it in the Coptic Liturgies of St Basil, St Gregory, and St Cyril, the Syro-Jacobite offices, the Nestorian, the Mozarabic, and Ambrosian rites. In the Ethiopic Canon, as in our own liturgy, it is misplaced after the Communion," p. 512. "The Ethiopic Canon is not less anomalous in the position of the Embolismus (*i.e.*, the *Libera nos*) than in that of the Lord's Prayer. The latter, as we have seen, is quite out of place by being postponed until the people have communicated; the Embolismus precedes it, and is said by the people," p. 515.

throughout the year—viz., the Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory, and Communion. Another manuscript also gives the Responsals or Antiphonary for the anthems sung at different offices. The revision of these books not only involved the correction and modification of the text or ritual, but took Gregory into the region of music. With customary energy he determined that the ecclesiastical chant should be complete and efficient, and he founded two choral schools—one at the Lateran, and the other at St Peter's. The schools existed in the time of John the Deacon, who narrates that in his day, nearly three hundred years after, an authentic copy of the Antiphonary was preserved, with the couch on which Gregory reclined to listen to the boys' voices, and the rod with which he kept them in order. This incident conjures up a charming picture of the great Pontiff, interrupting the dictation of letters to emperor or queens, the precautions against the Lombards, or the cares of his episcopal labours, to range before his sick couch his class of boys, and to guide them with rod in hand through the intricacies of the chant.

Gregory attempted a reform of the Church music. A more melodious and elaborate system had taken its rise in the Eastern churches, and under the sanction of St Ambrose had been introduced into the church of Milan, to which St Augustine alludes: "But when I call to mind the tears which I shed at the music in your church in the beginning of my recovered faith, and how I am even now moved by it, not by the singing itself, but by what is sung by liquid and well-modulated voices, I then acknowledge the utility of this custom. And thus I fluctuate between dangerous

pleasure and experience of its advantage, and I am on the whole inclined, though not with a fixed opinion, to approve of your way of singing in church, that through the ears' delight, the mind may be roused to pious emotions. Yet when it happens that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned, and then I would rather not have heard the singing."[1] By the time of Gregory this music may have degenerated into a lightness unworthy of the Church, and his revision was a return to a more severe ancient style.

That he attributed considerable importance to music is evident, for besides founding the two schools, he endowed them so that they might become permanent. The continuance of the schools for at least three centuries made his influence on the music of the church lasting, and doubtless contributed to associate his name with ecclesiastical chant. His personal supervision of the choristers testifies to his interest in the rendering of the music, and to his patience in teaching the boys without modern scales or appliances. It is impossible to determine how much of what is now known as Gregorian chant dates back to the time of Gregory, but the eight modes ascribed to his name that have come down to us make us acquainted with the character of the music. Four of these are supposed to have existed before his time, being adapted from the Greek modes, and he added four subsidiary modes, and thus enlarged the range of ecclesiastical melody. During his lifetime they were conveyed to Britain by the missionary monks, and later they were adopted in Germany and France.

[1] *Confess.*, x 33.

John the Deacon has an amusing description of the execution of the chant by German throats: "Among the peoples of Europe, the Germans, or Gauls, have in a remarkable manner been able to learn, and frequently to relearn the sweetness of this modulation, but have not been able to keep it incorrupt, both on account of levity of mind which mixed some things of their own with the Gregorian chants, and from a natural savageness. For Alpine bodies, deeply resounding in the thunder of their voices, are not readily accommodated to the sweetness of sustained modulation; for when the barbarous roughness of a bibulous throat strives to produce soft singing with inflections and accents, it casts their voices into a certain natural grating like the confused sound of waggons coming down stairs, and instead of soothing the minds of the hearers, rather provokes them to exasperation and clamorous interruption."[1]

A medieval legend gauges the popular feeling about Gregory's work for ecclesiastical chant. Meditating on the wonderful power of profane music to fascinate the mind, he began to think whether he could not consecrate it to the service of God. One night in a vision he saw the Church, under the form of a muse attired in magnificent robes, and while writing her songs, like a hen with her chickens she gathered all her children under her mantle, upon which was written the art of music with the names of the tones and numbers of the neumes. The Pope prayed for the faculty of recollecting all that he saw, and a dove appeared, who dictated to him the compositions.

[1] *John the Deacon*, ii 7.

Several of the liturgical hymns are attributed to Gregory, and it seems fairly established that eight are due to his pen. Six are in strophes of four lines of Iambic dimeter, and two in Sapphic verse; one is in rhyme. The general character of the hymns is more adapted for public singing than for private prayer, and they may have been written for use in monasteries.[1]

At the same time that Gregory actively fostered ecclesiastical chant he was careful not to allow it to interfere with the sacred ministry. A decree of the Roman Synod, held in 595, runs as follows: "In the holy Roman Church, over which Divine Providence has called me to preside, a very reprehensible custom has lately arisen, for some cantors are chosen for the ministry of the sacred altar, who, raised to the diaconate, spend their time in the modulation of their voice, whereas it is fitting that they should be employed over the office of preaching and the duty of almsgiving. Whence it sometimes happens that, while a pleasing voice is sought for the sacred ministry, a fitting life is disregarded, and a cantor-minister irritates God by his conduct while he delights the people with his voice. In this matter I ordain by the present decree, that the sacred ministers of the altar shall not sing, and in the solemnities of the Mass shall only discharge the office of reading the gospel. I decree that the Psalms and other lessons

[1] The eight hymns are: *Primo dierum omnium* and *Nocte surgentes vigilemus omnes* on Sunday at Matins, *Ecce jam noctis tenuatur umbra* on Sunday at Lauds, *Lucis Creator optime* on Sunday at Vespers, *Clarum decus jejunii* in Lent at Matins, *Audi benigne Conditor* in Lent at Vespers, *Magno salutis gaudio* on Palm Sunday, and *Rex Christe factor omnium* for Passiontide.

shall be read by sub-deacons and by all in minor orders if necessary."[1]

In connection with ritual observance there is a letter to the Roman citizens, in which Gregory calls attention to some who taught that the Saturday should be observed rigidly by abstaining from all work. "After the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, the precepts of the law, which were delivered as figures, are not to be observed literally, for if anyone says that Saturday is to be observed let him also say that carnal sacrifices should be offered, and that the precept of circumcision is still to be retained." He continues in reference to frequenting the baths on Sundays: "Another thing I have heard that some perverse men have been preaching to you that no one should bathe on a Sunday. If anyone bathes from luxury or pleasure we do not grant that it should be done on any day, but we do not prohibit it on Sunday for the necessity of the body. . . . For if it be a sin to bathe on a Sunday, the face ought not to be washed on that day. If this is allowed for a part of the body, why should it be denied to the whole body if required? On Sunday we should cease from earthly labour and persist in prayer to the best of our power, so that if there is any negligence in the six days it may be expiated by prayer on the day of the resurrection of the Lord."[2]

Amid the multitude of other anxieties and business his care and attention to church liturgy and music present another example of Gregory's versatility of mind and untiring devotion to labour. Those who have had experience of the training of choirs, of the

[1] Ep. App. v 1. [2] Ep. xiii 1.

minuteness of questions of ritual, will appreciate the amount of time, patience, and work the great Pontiff must have bestowed on liturgy and chant. His orderly and comprehensive mind took in the whole range of ecclesiastical discipline. He not only enforced due order in the form of government, due adjustment of the powers of Patriarch, Bishop and cleric, and corrected abuses of every description, but this care for liturgy and chant shows that he extended his vigilance to the most minute details of the service of God.

CHAPTER XVI

PERSONAL TRAITS, SUFFERINGS, AND DEATH

Love of work and constant occupation were a leading feature in Gregory's life. The public and private business recounted in the preceding chapters implied a continued routine of work made irksome by a dread of responsibility and a distaste for secular cares. The quiet for which he longed was not ease, the monastic peace that he regretted was freedom from care, not freedom from labour. In spite of the multitude of public duties and interests, he devoted as much time to private work as any man of his time. No contemporary writer has left such a record of literary labour. The *Book of Pastoral Rule*, the *Morals of Job*, the Sacramentary, and the Antiphonary, have already been noticed. Besides the *Commentary on Job* there are extant a *Commentary on the First Book of Kings*, expositions of the Canticle of Canticles and the seven Penitential Psalms, two books of Homilies on the Book of Ezechiel, and forty Homilies on the Gospels. He speaks of further works on Scripture: "Moreover, since my dearest and former son Claudius had heard me speaking on Proverbs, the Canticle of Canticles, the Prophets, the Book of Kings, and the Heptateuch, and because I could not deliver them in writing on account of infirmity, he took them down in substance so that they might not perish in oblivion, and intended at a fitting time to bring them to me to

be more correctly written. When he had read them to me I found that the meaning of my words had been changed very uselessly. Whence it is necessary that your Experience without any excuse or delay should go to his monastery, call the brethren together, and thoroughly revise with all exactness whatever manuscripts of the different Scriptures he has brought. Do you take them and send them to me as quickly as possible."[1] So also: "You wish that certain things about Samson should be allegorically treated, but so great a weakness of body has come over me, that if I were to undertake it, the mind would not rouse itself to the exertion. I rejoice in your good desire by which, while you wish for the exposition of the sacred words, you show how intently you seek the author of the words. If I recover the strength of health I shall by the help of God obey your desire."[2]

His letters, of which upwards of eight hundred are extant, testify decisively to the prodigious activity and versatility of the great Pontiff. They comprise fourteen volumes, one for each year of the pontificate. The original volumes mentioned by John the Deacon are lost; what is preserved is the register or official copies made before the letters were despatched. Important correspondence concerning the government of the Church was necessarily copied, and other letters also of a private nature, but doubtless very many were never copied at all; indeed, Ewald, after thorough investigation, thinks that only a small portion of Gregory's correspondence has come down to us. The variety of subjects contained in the letters, and the time, inquiry, deliberation, and decision that each

[1] Ep. xii 24. [2] Ep. xii 40.

question required before an individual letter could be written, give an insight into the vast amount of work that the letters imply, for all bear the stamp and character of Gregory's individuality, and were personally dictated by him. In the first three years of his pontificate there are circular letters to all the bishops of Italy, to the bishops of Numidia, the bishops of Illyria, Dalmatia, Sicily, Corinth, of Iberia in the Caucasus, and to the Oriental Patriarchs. He cited the schismatics of Istria to Rome, regulated the election of the See of Milan, organised the opposition to the Donatists in Africa, issued instructions to Honoratus and Sabinianus the successive legates at Constantinople, administered reproofs to Natalis of Salona and John of Constantinople, and supported and defended Dominic of Carthage. He despatched ordinances, advice, and requests for the defence of Rome, Naples, and other cities against the Lombards, he treated with St Leander about the Arians in Spain, and with Virgilius about the Jews in Gaul. In the same brief space he provided for churches deprived of their pastors, protected the monks and reformed their discipline, corrected abuses in the dioceses of Italy, came to the assistance of the poor and destitute, put in order the estates of the patrimony, watched over the bishops of the West, provided assistance for churches in the far East, and withstood the oppression of civil and military officials. This summary of three years' letters of a sickly man displays an amount of mental energy and unflagging work that commands wonder and admiration.

The four books of *Dialogues* are of quite a different character to the treatises on Holy Scripture. They

consist, excepting the second—which is wholly dedicated to St Benedict—of short lives of holy persons who flourished in Italy, and are written with an interlocutor, Peter, which gives them a light and familiar tone, and enables him to explain difficulties and add comments in answer to Peter's questions. He mentions the work in a letter to Maximianus, of Syracuse: "My brethren who live here with me press me very much to write a brief account of the miracles of the fathers which occurred in Italy. For which work I greatly need the help of your Charity, if you would briefly tell me what you can call to mind, and what you happen to know. I remember you told me something about the Abbot Anastasius, of Pentonis, which I have forgotten. I beg you to write this and any other matters, and send them to me quickly, if you cannot come yourself."[1]

In commencing them he states that what he relates has either been obtained from letters of friends who are good and reliable witnesses, or from what he has learned himself. They recount virtuous examples, striking miracles and chastisements of God, accompanied by moral observations suited to an unlearned reader. Spiritual unction breathes through the pages in a style simple, lovable, and homely, such that a father would use in speaking to his children. The stories narrated have been stigmatised as trivial and an outrage on common sense, and Gregory set down as credulous and without judgement. Due allowance is scarcely made for the circumstances of the time, and the end that Gregory proposed in narrating the stories. He does not commit himself to their

[1] Ep. iii 51.

accuracy, but states that he received them on trustworthy authority. It was by no means a critical age, but one of continued calamity, and during such periods people look for wonders, and even educated men are led to give credence to signs and portents. Modern times can furnish instances of similar circumstances and similar dispositions. Gregory used his stories as examples to illustrate his teaching, and in selecting them he doubtless did not pass them through a rigid scrutiny of proof, provided that they came from a reliable source and assisted his purpose. They are written with candour and simplicity to inculcate moral lessons, with an undercurrent of spiritual teaching running through the whole, and should be read in the spirit in which they were written.

Gregory's writings have been deservedly esteemed, not only in his own time but in each succeeding age; and, as a test of their value, the popular voice has numbered him amongst the four great doctors of the Western Church. Of these doctors Gregory himself thus speaks: "In the Church the order of doctors presides like a king, whom the crowd of the faithful surrounds."[1] He left aside the speculative doctrinal theories and dogmatic politics of the older fathers, and accommodated his books to the spirit of the time. He shows a thorough mastery of Sacred Scripture, which he quotes with ease and always appositely. His *Commentary on Job* comprised a system of moral theology; his letters contain a synopsis of ecclesiastical discipline and law, and his homilies and expositions are frequently used in the divine office. His style has been attacked for its inferior Latin; though elo-

[1] *Lib. Moral.*, xx 5.

quent, it is subject to a certain redundancy, and contains constructions that are not in vogue with good classical writers; but he wrote in what may be called the transition stage between the classical and ecclesiastical Latin, and his style helped to form the latter. In the introductory letter to St Leander, prefixed to the *Morals of Job*, he says: "Hence I have neglected to keep the rules of speaking which the teachers of grammar inculcate. For, as the tenor of this letter intimates, I do not fly from the collision of the metacism.[1] I do not avoid the confusion of barbarisms, and I neglect to keep the position and artistic arrangement of the case of prepositions, for I think it highly unbecoming that I should restrict the words of heavenly speech by the rules of Donatus."[2]

The accusation of having destroyed the Palatine library through depreciation of classical writers is without foundation, and a passage quoted from a letter to the Bishop of Vienne, in which Gregory blames him for speaking the praises of Jove and the praises of God with the same lips, refers only to a too great inclination to classical studies to the detriment of his pastoral duties. In the *Commentary on the First Book of Kings* he explains his view of secular learning: "This erudition of seculars by itself is not beneficial for the spiritual conflict of saints, but if joined to divine Scripture, the knowledge of the Scripture is more completely understood. For this only are the liberal arts to be acquired, that by their instruction the divine words may be more thoroughly mastered. The malignant spirits take away the desire of learning

[1] *i.e.*, the frequent repetition of the letter m.
[2] *Introd. ad Moral.*, c. v.

from some, in order that through ignorance of secular things they may not reach the sublimity of spiritual things. It is well said: The Philistines took care that the Jews should not make sword and lance. The demons evidently know that when we are efficient in secular learning, we are helped in spiritual knowledge. When, therefore, they dissuade us from learning these things, what do they but take care that we do not make lance or sword?"[1]

In his ever-abiding humility, Gregory had a lowly opinion of his own writings. To his friend, St Leander, he says: "Since you love me exceedingly well, you will read in the tablets of your heart with what longing I thirst to see you. But because I cannot see you in the great distance between us, I have done one thing that affection dictated to me: I have sent to your Holiness by our mutual son, the priest Probinus, the book of Pastoral Rule which I wrote at the beginning of my Episcopate, and the books you know I had already written in exposition of blessed Job. Of this work I have not sent the volumes of the third and fourth part, which I have already given to monasteries. Your Holiness will carefully read them, and more carefully grieve for my sins, that I may not be guilty of grave fault in thus seeming to know what I fail to do."[2] He also writes to his agent John, at Ravenna: "I hear from certain reports that my most reverend brother and fellow-bishop Marinianus orders the commentary on blessed Job to be read publicly at Matins. At this I am not pleased at all, for it is not a popular work, and to uneducated hearers it may become a hindrance

[1] *In prim. Regum*, v 30. [2] Ep. v 49.

rather than an assistance. Tell him to read at Matins some commentary on the Psalms which may tend to instruct the minds of seculars in good conduct. As long as I am alive, if I happen to have said anything, I wish that it shall not be easily made known to men. For I am very much annoyed that Anatolius the Deacon, of happy memory, gave the book on Pastoral Rule to the Lord Emperor at his request and command, which my most holy brother and fellow-bishop Anastasius of Antioch translated into Greek. They wrote to me that it pleased him very much, but it very much displeased me that they who have better things to do should occupy themselves over trifles."[1]

To Innocent, the prefect of Africa, he says: "We are very glad at your wish that we should send you the book of exposition of blessed Job, because in it we see that your Eminence desires not to allow yourself to be entirely occupied in external things, but to recover again into your heart what is dispersed by secular cares. But if you wish to feast on delicious food read the works of your countryman blessed Augustine, and do not seek our bran in preference to his wheat."[2] At the end of the *Morals* he thus humbly reviews his intention: "At the conclusion of this work I see that I should come back into myself, for the mind, even when striving to speak correctly, is much dissipated outside itself. For while words are sought by which the better to express thoughts, the integrity of mind suffers by being dispersed over many things. Therefore should we come back from public speech to the care of the heart, so that I may call together the thoughts of the mind into a kind of

[1] Ep. xii 24. [2] Ep. x 37.

council of consultation to decide on myself, and thus I may determine whether I have not said evil things incautiously or good things imperfectly. A good thing is well said when the speaker strives in what he says to please him from whom he has received it. Although I cannot discover that I have said any evil thing, yet I do not assert that I have never done so. If I have said good things, receiving them from above, I acknowledge that my incompetency has expressed them badly. For coming back interiorly into myself, putting aside the leaves of words, putting aside the branches of sentences, when I look deeply at the root of my intention I know that in it I have wished to my utmost to please God, but in the same intention by which I strive to please God, furtively, I know not how, the desire of human praise is present, as I discover afterwards and gradually, so that I find myself to have done differently to what I began to do."[1]

In glancing at the private life or character of Gregory, the feature most prominent is his humility or sinking of self. Again and again, in public and private letters, the absence of self-assertion and the frequent apology for the exercise of his authority, become most noticeable, and probably this contributed in no small degree to the success of his government. He writes to Natalis of Salona: "Your Fraternity has taken offence at being reprehended by me for those banquets, when I, who have transgressed, not by my conduct, but from my position, am ready to be corrected by all, to be amended by all, and I look upon him only as a friend by whose tongue I cleanse the stains of my soul before the appearance of the strict

[1] *Lib. Moral.*, xxxv 49.

Judge."[1] "I acknowledge," he writes to Anastasius, of Antioch, "that you have placed the estimation of myself in the greatest doubt. For consider who I am, that I find in myself no sign of this good. Then consider who you are, that I think you cannot speak untruly. When, therefore, I wish to believe what you say, my worthlessness prevents me; when I wish to dispute what you say in my praise, your sanctity prevents me. But I ask you, holy man, to come to this agreement in our contest, that, if what you say is not yet true, it may become true because you say it."[2] So also to Anastasius, a priest of Isauria: "Since it is still uncertain what we are interiorly, why did you not dare to write that you did not know who was superior, you or I? I know, indeed, that you have lived well, but I am conscious that I am burdened with many sins. But even if you were a sinner, I am a greater one; for you have only your own sins, while I bear the sins of those committed to me. In this I look upon you as exalted; I look upon you as great; for before human eyes you have not attained a great and exalted position, in which, often while honour is given outwardly by men, the soul is submerged to the depths by wrecking cares."[3]

To his friend, St Leander, to whom he was accustomed to open his soul, he writes: "Your letter speaks of my life as worthy of imitation in all things, but since this is not as you say, may it become so, in order that you may not, contrary to your custom, speak an untruth. . . . For, good man, I am not to-day the same as you knew me. I acknowledge that, externally much exalted, I have really fallen,

[1] Ep. ii 52. [2] Ep. i 26. [3] Ep. vii 32.

and I very much fear that I am among the number of those of whom it is written: *When they were lifted up, thou hast cast them down.*[1] He is cast down when lifted up, who exalted in honour falls in conduct. . . . This burdensome honour now depresses me much, innumerable cares create a din around me, and when the mind collects itself for God, they cleave it with their noise as with piercing swords. There is no rest of heart. It lies prostrate in the depths, oppressed by the weight of its thoughts. Seldom or never do the wings of contemplation raise it on high. The sluggish mind is listless, and almost reduced to stupor in the temporal cares which roar around; at one time it is engaged over earthly things, at another over what is even carnal, and sometimes with exacting loathing it is forced into things, to which even fault is attached. What more can I say? . . . In the midst of this, I beseech you by Almighty God to hold me up by the hand of your prayers who have fallen into the waves of trouble. I sailed with a prosperous wind when I led a tranquil life in the monastery, but suddenly a tempest aroused by stormy gusts caught me in its turmoil, and I lost the prosperity of my voyage, for I suffered shipwreck in the lost quiet of mind. Behold now I am tossed on the waves, and I seek the plank of your intercession, so that I, who have not deserved to bring in the whole ship with its rich cargo, may at least reach the shore on a plank."[2]

He takes notice of even trivial things that might be an occasion of pride to him. In a letter to Rusticiana he says: "I have received the letter of your Excellence, which in my serious illness has

[1] Ps. lxxii 18. [2] Ep. ix 121.

assured me of your health, devotedness, and kindness. One thing I am displeased at, for in your letter, not once only but frequently, you say 'your handmaid,' 'your handmaid.' Since by the burden of the Episcopate I am become the servant of all, what reason is there for calling yourself a handmaid to me, when I was your client before I was raised to the Episcopate? Therefore, I ask you by Almighty God, not to let me find the term again in your letters."[1] "When I came to the seat of Government," he writes to Cyriacus of Constantinople, "conscious of my weakness, I determined sometimes to betake myself to more quiet spots, but since the divine judgement is against me I submitted my heart to the yoke of the Creator, weighing this chiefly, that without the grace of God we cannot save our souls in retired places, for at times in them we witness the wanderings of the elect. Lot was just in that wicked city, but sinned in the mountain. But why mention this when we know of greater examples? What is more pleasant than paradise? What more secure than heaven? Yet by sinning man fell from paradise and angels from heaven. His power is to be sought by us, his grace is to be asked, without whom nothing is without fault, with whom nothing is without justice."[2]

In what may be called his private correspondence, the kindly and gentle side of Gregory's character is conspicuous. So many of his public letters are taken up with exacting ecclesiastical discipline that, although they are tempered with moderation and seasoned with charity, they leave the impression of a stern rigid spirit. When he lays aside the censor and speaks to

[1] Ep. xi 44. [2] Ep. vii 4.

his friends in the natural bent of his heart, his affectionate regard for their welfare and sympathy for their troubles manifest the kindliness of his heart. Throughout his private letters there is a vein of solicitude for the spiritual well-being of his correspondents that indicates a deeper affection than mere conventional phrases of friendly intercourse. Writing to Gregoria, a lady of the Court of Maurice, he thus gently treats a rather extravagant request: "I have received the welcome letter of your Sweetness, in which you strive your utmost to accuse yourself of a multitude of sins. But I know that you love Almighty God fervently, and I trust in his mercy that the sentence applies to you which the lips of Truth applied to a certain holy woman: *Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much.*[1] . . . Your Sweetness added in your letter that you were impatiently waiting for me to say whether it has been revealed to me that your sins are forgiven, and you have asked me a difficult and a useless thing. Difficult, for I am not worthy of receiving a revelation; useless, because you ought not to be secure about your sins, unless at the last day of your life, when you shall no longer be able to weep for the same sins. Until that day shall come you ought always to be anxious, always to be in fear of your faults, and to cleanse them by daily tears. It is certain that the Apostle Paul ascended to the third heaven, was led into Paradise, heard secret words, and yet he still feared, saying: *But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others I myself should become reprobate.*[2] If he

[1] Luke vii 47 [2] 1 Cor. ix 27.

feared who was led up to heaven, should not we fear who still live on earth? Reflect, dearest daughter, that security is usually the mother of negligence. You ought not then to have security in this life, by which you are rendered negligent."[1]

He writes to Theoctista, the sister of the Emperor: "In the letter of your Excellence I find that you are reluctant to tell me about our most Serene Lady, whether she studiously reads and whether she has compunction in reading. Your presence ought to do her much good, so that in the midst of the waves of business which constantly surround her, and by which she is unconsciously drawn to exterior things, she may always be called interiorly to the love of the heavenly country. And you ought also to watch whether, when she is given to tears for her soul, she has compunction from fear or from love." He describes the two kinds of compunction, and continues: "You, who by the power of the Lord have experience of both kinds of compunction, ought every day to consider carefully by what words you may benefit your most Serene Lady. I beg you to take care to instruct the young lords whom you nurse, especially in their conduct, and to admonish the glorious eunuchs who are placed over them, to teach them what will move them to charity towards each other and gentleness towards their subjects, lest any hatred commence in them now and afterwards break out openly. The words of nurses will be milk if good, but poison if evil. Let such things be suggested to them now, that afterwards they may mani-

[1] Ep. vii 45.

fest the goodness of what they imbibed from the lips of their nurses."[1]

Later, Theoctista had been subject to anxiety on account of the tongues of evil men, and Gregory thus consoles her: "I mention that I know how, through the levity of the people, a tumult of detraction has arisen against you. Through this, I hear that your Excellence has been afflicted with no slight disgust. If so, I very much wonder why you, whose heart is fixed in heaven, should trouble yourself about the words of men on earth. . . . If any, even slight, annoyance has come to your mind through this, I believe that Almighty God has mercifully permitted it to happen, for he has not promised to his elect in this life the pleasures of delight but the bitterness of tribulation; so that, as is done by medicine, through a bitter draught they may return to the enjoyment of eternal health. . . . Consider, I beg you, where would there be room for patience if there were nothing to be endured? I do not think Abel would have existed if he had not a brother Cain. If there were good men without evil men, they could not be perfectly good, because they could not be purified. The society of the bad is the purification of the good. . . . There are many who perhaps praise the life of the good more than they ought, and lest any elation should despoil them on account of this praise, Almighty God permits that evil men should launch forth in disparagement and reproof, so that, if any fault is born in the heart from the lips of flatterers, it may be suffocated by the lips of revilers. . . . These things I have briefly mentioned, most Sweet and

[1] Ep. vii 26.

Excellent daughter, lest when you know that foolish men depreciate you, you be afflicted by even the slightest sorrow of mind. Since the murmurs of the foolish can be quieted by calm reason, I think it would be sinful to neglect to do the good that you are able. . . . Let your Excellence continue without interruption in reading, prayer, and almsgiving, and, as I have asked you, appease their ignorance by gentle exhortation and replies, so that not only through your own deeds, but through theirs you may obtain the glory of eternal reward."[1]

The following gentle admonition to his friend Theodore, the Court physician, to whom he frequently wrote, illustrates Gregory's method of showing his real affection for his friends, and of saying a word in season. After affectionate greetings and thanks for a donation for the redemption of captives, he continues: "But because he who loves much presumes much, I have a complaint against the most gentle soul of my most Illustrious son Theodore, for he has received from the holy Trinity gifts of intellect, gifts of property, gifts of money and charity, but unceasingly involved in secular matters, occupied in constant business, he daily neglects the word of his Redeemer. What is the Sacred Scripture but the letter of Almighty God to his creatures? And undoubtedly if your Excellence were away from Court and received a letter from the Emperor, you would not keep quiet, nor rest, nor sleep until you had found out what the Emperor had written to you. The Emperor of heaven, the Lord of men and angels, has sent to you his letters for the regulation of your life,

[1] Ep. xi 45.

and yet, Illustrious son, you neglect to read those letters. Strive, therefore, I beseech you, to meditate daily on the words of your Creator. Learn the heart of God from the word of God, that you may the more ardently sigh for eternal things, and your soul may burn with more ardent desire for eternal joys. He will have greater rest, the less rest he gives himself in the love of his Creator. To obtain this may Almighty God breathe into you his consoling spirit. May he fill your soul with his presence, and, filling it, elevate it. As for myself, know that I suffer many bitternesses, but I give thanks to Almighty God that I suffer very much less than I deserve."[1]

He writes also to two ladies, Barbara and Antonina, about reading. "These things do not worry me, for I wish that you would love to read the Sacred Scriptures, so that when Almighty God shall have joined you to husbands, you may know how to live and how to regulate your house."[2] So also to Dominic, a bishop in Armenia: "I am exceedingly glad that your sweetest Blessedness, while thus occupied in secular cares, turns your mind to the understanding of the sacred word. For it is necessary that, if the former cannot be entirely avoided, the latter should not be altogether laid aside. But by Almighty God I beg you to extend the hand of prayer to me struggling in the waves of tribulation, that by your intercession I may be raised to the surface, who am pressed down to the depths by the weight of my faults. I am sorry that the Emperor of Persia has not been converted, but I very much rejoice that you have preached to him the Christian faith; for although he has not deserved

[1] Ep. iv 31. [2] Ep. xi 78.

to receive the light, yet your Holiness will have merited the reward of preaching. For the Ethiopian goes into the bath black, and comes out of it black, yet the bath-keeper receives the money."[1]

In a letter to Rusticiana he playfully twits her with hurrying through the holy places. "On receiving the letter of your Excellence I was glad to hear that you went to Mount Sinai. Believe me, I would willingly have gone with you, but would not have returned with you. It is difficult for me to believe that you have seen many of the fathers when you were at the holy places, for if you had seen them you could not have returned so quickly to Constantinople. Since the love of that city could not depart from your heart, I suspect that your Excellence did not allow your heart to dwell on the holy things that you saw with your eyes. May Almighty God illuminate your mind by the grace of his piety; may he give you to know and to reflect that all temporal things are fleeting, and that while we speak time flies; soon the Judge will come, and behold it is time to leave the world reluctantly, which we would not do of our own accord."[2]

The sacrifice of all his paternal property before he became a monk, and the large scale of Gregory's benevolence as Pontiff, preclude the supposition of any love of money or anxiety to acquire worldly possessions, but even for his charities he manifested an evident reluctance to accept money from those who were in any way straitened. His estimate of the relations of a pastor to money appears in a letter to his friend Marinianus, of Ravenna: "Because I love you

[1] Ep. iii 67. [2] Ep. iv 46.

much I admonish you strictly to examine whether you look after money rather than souls. The former is to be regarded as an accessory, but the latter should be sought for with all the attention of the mind, and striven for exceedingly. Vigilantly spend your labour and solicitude over this, for in the office of a priest our Redeemer does not seek for gold, but for souls."[1] "I acknowledge," he writes to Theodore, "that to me it is painful to expend another's money, for besides rendering an account for ecclesiastical property, I have now to give an account of the goods of my sweetest son and lord Theodore. . . . But we ask you to pray for us, that we may not dispense the fruit of your labour indiscreetly and where there is no need, lest from that which lessens your sins ours may increase."[2] To John of Syracuse, who had sent him some money for alms, he says: "But we think it is too much and unreasonable according to the measure of your means, that you who have innumerable poor with you should seek other and far distant places for fulfilling the bounty of mercy."[3] So also to John of Prima Justiniana: "I am altogether reluctant to accept the presents from your Holiness, for it seems very incongruous to take gifts from burdened and afflicted brethren, but your delegates have overcome me with one argument, bringing them to him (St Peter) by whom the offerings of your Fraternity cannot be repelled."[4]

To Andrew, a man of means, he thus speaks of wealth: "Why then, Magnificent son, do you not consider that the world has an end? Everything

[1] Ep. vi 29.
[2] Ep. vii 28.
[3] Ep. vii 9.
[4] Ep. ii 23.

reminds us daily that we are to render an account to the eternal and terrible Judge. Our life is like a voyage. He who sails, though he stand, sit, or lie down, yet goes on because he is led by the motion of the ship. So is it with us, whether sleeping or waking, whether silent or speaking, whether walking, whether willing or unwilling, through the moments of time we approach daily to the end. When the day of our end shall come where will be all that we have amassed with such anxiety and such solicitude? Honour, therefore, or riches are not to be sought, for they pass away. If we seek good things, we love what will have no end. If we fear evil, we fear what the reprobate have to endure without end."[1]

From Gregory's humility and disregard of earthly things, he was reluctant to engage in contests about property, and meekly submitted to injustice provided that the interest of the poor did not suffer. He thus writes to Italica, a lady of position, about a matter in dispute: "May Almighty God bring to pass that the good which we think of you, may induce your mind to return good to us, and that the gentleness which you express in words may be shown also in deeds. For the most perfect health and beauty on the surface of the body avail nothing, if disease lurks within. Even so, discord in a household is the more to be guarded against where there is external peace amongst the retinue. About what your Excellence tries to call to mind in former cases, know that we wrote to you that we were anxious to settle with you the causes of the poor without scandal or judicial process. This also we remember to have written, that, by the help of

[1] Ep. vii 29.

the Lord, we refrain from law-suits with ecclesiastical moderation, and, according to the Apostolic precept, joyfully suffer the loss of goods. But we wish you to know that our silence and patience in the affairs of the poor are not to be used to the prejudice of future Pontiffs after us. Hence, in fulfilment of our above-mentioned promise, we have resolved to remain silent on the points at issue, nor in those wherein we may determine to act less gently do we desire to engage personally in the business."[1]

He calls the attention of Clementina, another lady, to the spirit of rancour and unforgiveness: "I am told that you retain unpardonable vexation against anyone who offends you. If this is true I am very sorry, because I love you much. I ask you nobly to cast aside this vice from you, and not to allow the seed of the enemy to grow up in the crop of good works. Call to mind the words of the Lord's Prayer, and let not the trespass have greater weight with you than the forgiveness. Let the goodness of your Glory overcome this excess, and secure for yourself the good will of him whom persistent asperity would render hostile. Leave him matter for shame, and do not preserve for him cause for irritation. For often a discreet remission in correction has more effect than sternness in exacting punishment, so that the one renders a man more faithful and submissive, while the other makes him obstinate and grudging. We do not say this to lead you away from the zeal of righteousness, but lest you should deal with little things as you would with great. For when the nature of the excess demands severity, you should so act that

[1] Ep. iii 60.

punishment may correct the fault, yet afterwards that favour may not be withheld from him who is corrected. We warn you, out of paternal affection, for the sake of your soul; take what is said in charity, and apply it for the benefit of your Glory, so that your good works may be brighter before men and most pure before God."[1]

On several occasions Gregory tried to rectify any ill-feeling caused by his remonstrance, for, however he may have veiled his reproofs with charity, they sometimes led to bitter feelings. He thus writes to Amandinus: "Something had reached me about the person of the Glorious Libertinus, and we could not be silent about it to you, whom we love as a son, and also because we notice in the letter of your Glory that you have taken offence at it, which is not reasonable when we remember that we have written nothing bitterly, but exhorted you to have charity and friendship with him. But since you have written that you were prohibited in a dream from answering these bitter things, and thus did not send that letter to us, we thank Almighty God who so preserves you when awake that he admonishes you when asleep. But since you write that in the same dream you were blamed by me for the same cause, gather from this what I am, and when I warn you with fraternal admonition you ought not to take offence, for if I am sincere to those asleep I do not allow myself to be false to those awake."[2] "It has reached me," he writes to Opportunus, "that from the time I grieved you, beloved, with sharp words on account of something which had displeased me, a great grief has come

[1] Ep. x 15. [2] Ep. x 32.

over you, and continued anxiety of mind. Whence, dearest son, I wish you to know that I spoke those words not in bitterness of heart, but from love of your soul."[1]

In spite of Gregory's occupations and his protests that he could give little time to contemplation, there can be little doubt that he spent much time in prayer. From the extracts already quoted, it will be gathered that prayer was uppermost in his mind, for he rarely concludes a letter without a prayer; he frequently recommends prayer, and asks prayers for himself. Some of the letters are entirely dedicated to this request for mutual prayer. He writes to Dominic of Carthage: "The terms of your letter, full of priestly charity, have so fixed the image of your Holiness on my mind, that I cannot believe him to be absent in body who remains always in the heart by affection. In order, then, that the love we have one for another may gain for us the benefit of heavenly joys, let us be helpers one to another, and procure assistance by mutual prayer, so that the divine mercy may grant to us the gift of his clemency, that we may preach what pleases him, and observe what we preach. Thus he may dispose the ministry of our office by the protection of his piety, so that we may report to the Lord when he comes the gain from what is entrusted to us, and that we may be led by the help of his grace to future recompense justly acquired from the gain of others, since it is written: Pray for one another that you may be saved. And that we may merit this, it is becoming for me to offer up prayers for you at the body of blessed Peter, the

[1] Ep. x 68.

Prince of the Apostles, and you for me over that of St Cyprian the Martyr. Our prayers will the more quickly reach the ears of the piety of the Lord, the more readily we comply with the precept which directs them to be poured forth for each other. Your Holiness declines to speak to us with naked words, but adds presents to your letter which we accept with thanks, but we are more pleased with the affection of your soul than with abundance of gifts."[1]

His letters abound in expressions of mutual charity, and he seems to make it the bond to unite him with the bishops of the Church; he thus writes to Anastasius of Antioch: "Your sweetest Holiness mentions that if possible you would wish to speak to me without paper or pen, and grieves that the distance between the East and the West lies between us. But I think this, and say truly, that on the paper your soul speaks to me without the paper, for in the words of your Holiness charity alone is heard, and we are not separated by distance who are joined by the bond of affection. Why do you ask for the wings of the silvery dove when you already have them? The wings are the love of God and our neighbour. By these the holy Church flies, by these it transcends all earthly things, and if your Holiness had them not, you could not have come to me with so much charity in your letter."[2]

In his consolation for the afflicted and his sympathy with distress, Gregory especially outpours the kindliness of his character. His large heart prompted his numberless charities, and he is equally sympathetic where money could not relieve the distress. His letters are rich

[1] Ep. vi 19. [2] Ep. viii 2.

in motives for patience. He writes to Andrew: "On hearing that grief and sickness had afflicted your Glory I sympathised with you very much. But when I understood that your soul remained undisturbed, my grief immediately turned into joy. I returned very many thanks to Almighty God, for he struck that he might heal, he afflicted that he might lead to true joy. Hence it is written: *For whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*[1] Hence Truth himself says: *My Father is the husbandman. Every branch on the tree that beareth not fruit he will take away; and every one that beareth fruit he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*[2] The unfruitful branch is taken away because the sinner must be thoroughly uprooted. The fruitful branch is said to be purged because it must be pruned by discipline that it may yield more abundant grace. So the grains of wheat are beaten on the threshing-floor and are denuded of husks and chaff. So olives, crushed in the press, flow with the richness of the oil. So the grapes of the vine, trodden with the heel, liquefy into wine. Rejoice then, good man, for, by your scourge and progress, you see that you are loved by the eternal Judge."[3]

To Palladius, of Mount Sinai, he writes: "Since I am aware that you know these things perfectly, I am astonished, beloved, that you are grieved by the words of men. Amid the words of flatterers and revilers we should always turn to our soul, and if we do not find there the good that is said of us great sorrow should arise, and, again, if we do not find there the evil that men speak of us we should break forth into great

[1] Heb. xii 6. [2] John xv 1, 2. [3] Ep. ix 33.

joy."[1] He administers comfort to a man and wife, Paschal and Constantia, who had suffered great losses: "Since you ought to be more solicitous for the health of your soul than for earthly benefits, greeting you with fatherly affection, we exhort you not to murmur against God when your mind is oppressed with the burden of tribulation, lest after the loss of your possessions injury to your soul may ensue. Be not ready to acquire anything by bad actions or with sin, as if from necessity, but having hope in the mercy of our Redeemer, who deserts not those who trust in him, endure patiently the inconveniences which you have incurred. Stir up your courage. Let not tribulation overcome your strength. Let patience conquer the adversity of the times. Let a determined mind despise the pomp of the world. Let your energy be spent over the things of God, considering how evil that is which is subject to chance and which has an end. Let not your heart be afflicted beyond what is proper, but strive to trust for justice in the protection of Almighty God, who gives what we have not, restores what is lost, and preserves what is restored."[2]

To Libertinus, an ex-Prefect, he writes under similar circumstances: "We are not ignorant how much the troubles of the times press upon you. Since in the midst of the greatest tribulation the only consolation is the mercy of the Creator, place your hope in him, and turn with all your mind to him who justly permits those to be afflicted whom he wills, and will mercifully deliver those who trust in him. Give thanks to him, and bear patiently what is sent, for it

[1] Ep. xi 2. [2] Ep. xiii 21.

is the sign of an upright mind not to bless God in prosperity only, but also to praise him in adversity. In what you suffer, then, let not any murmur against God steal into your heart, for the reason why our Creator acts is unknown to us. Perhaps, Magnificent son, you offended him by something when you were in prosperity, from which he wishes to cleanse you by merciful bitterness. Therefore, let not temporal affliction break you down, nor the loss of possessions torment you, for by giving thanks in adversity you will render God placable by patience, so that what has been lost may be restored with increase, and eternal joys added to it. I beg you not to take it offensively that we have written to Romanus the defensor, to provide twenty suits of clothes for your household, for however small an offering from the goods of blessed Peter the Apostle may appear, it should always be received as a great blessing, since he is able to bestow greater things here, and procure eternal benefits from Almighty God."[1]

The following letter to his friend Marinianus, of Ravenna, manifests Gregory's tender solicitude in a charming light: "On the arrival of a man from Ravenna, I was struck with greatest grief at his report that your Fraternity is ill with vomiting of blood. We have carefully made enquiries of each of the physicians here, whom we know to be skilled in the disease, and the opinion and prescription of each we have sent in writing to your Holiness. They prescribe rest and silence above all things, and I am very doubtful whether your Fraternity can obtain them at

[1] Ep. x 31.

your church. Therefore it seems to me that after arranging for the Church—who shall undertake the solemnities of the Mass, who shall take charge of the diocese, manage hospitality and receptions, and look after the monasteries—your Fraternity ought to come to me before the summer time, so that I may take your illness under my special care as far as I am able, and secure rest for you, for the physicians say that the summer time is very dangerous in this sickness. And I fear very much that, if you have any anxieties with unfavourable weather, you will be in greater danger from the illness. I myself also am very weak, and it would be very desirable that you should return to your church in full health, and decidedly, if you should be called away, that you be called away in our arms; as for myself, who seem near to death, if God should call me before you, it would be fitting for me to pass away in your arms. But if the state of the weather frightens you from coming, by making some little present you might arrange with Agonis to send his man with you as far as Rome. If you feel yourself upset by this sickness, and arrange to come, bring few people with you, for you will live in the house with me, and shall have daily attendance from this church.

"Moreover, I neither exhort nor admonish, but strictly forbid you to fast, for the doctors say that it is very injurious in this sickness. Should any great solemnity exact it, I grant it five times in the year. Moderate the vigils, too, and let the prayers over the candle that are customary at Ravenna, and the exposition of the Gospel, which priests undertake about Easter, be done by someone else; and, beloved, do not undertake any labour beyond your strength. I have

said this in case you feel better and defer coming, that you may know what to observe by my command."[1]

Gregory's own sickness alluded to in this letter continued intermittently throughout the Pontificate. In the Monastery of St. Andrew he was excessively weak and subject to fainting fits. When Agilulph threatened Rome in 595, the anxiety brought on a serious illness. He was liable to attacks of the gout, and suffered extremely from it; for two whole years, about 600, he scarcely left his bed. To his more intimate friends to whom he was accustomed to open his heart, he describes his sufferings. He thus writes to Eulogius of Alexandria: "I have received the letters of your sweetest Holiness during the past year, which I have not yet been able to answer through the excess of my sickness. Behold, two years nearly have expired during which I have kept my bed, and I have been so afflicted with the pains of the gout that scarcely on festival days have I been able to get up for the space of three hours to celebrate the solemnities of the Mass. Almost immediately I am compelled to lie down in great pain, so that I might alleviate my torture with occasional groans. Sometimes the pain is moderate, sometimes excessive, but it is never so moderate as to leave me, nor so excessive as to kill me. Hence it happens that I am daily in death, and daily snatched from death. Nor can I be surprised that so great a sinner should be shut up in this prison of corruption. Hence I am compelled to cry out: *Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name*.[2] But since I have not yet been able to obtain this by my prayers, I ask the prayers of your Holiness

[1] Ep. xi 33. [2] Ps. cxli 8.

to give me the assistance of your intercession that I may be restored, free from the weight of sin and corruption, into that liberty of the glory of the sons of God which you so well understand."[1]

To his friend Marinianus: "It is now a long time since I rose from my bed. At one time the pain of the gout tortures me, at another I know not what fire spreads itself over all my body, and sometimes it happens that at the same time the burning struggles with the pain, and body and mind seem to be leaving me. I cannot tell you how many other troubles I endure beyond the sickness I have mentioned. In brief, I feel that the prostration from these attacks so engrosses me that to live is a penalty, and I eagerly wait for death, which I believe to be the only remedy for my pains. Then, dearest brother, ask mercy for me of the divine clemency, that he may mercifully mitigate the scourge with which he strikes me, and grant me patience to bear it, lest the heart, which God forbid, break out into impatience from too great weariness, and that the fault which can be thoroughly cured by suffering may not be increased by my murmuring."[2]

In a letter to Venantius, who also suffered from gout, he takes mutual comfort: "Sending you the customary greetings, I wish to speak of what I suffer, but I think it incongruous to tell you what you already experience. For I am tormented with pains of the gout, which have attacked both you and me in much the same way, for they increase exceedingly with us, and we are both declining in life. In the midst of them, what else can we do except always call

[1] Ep. x 35. [2] Ep. xi 32.

to mind our sins, and give thanks to Almighty God? Since we have sinned much by the persuasion of the flesh, we are purified by the affliction of the flesh. We should remember also that, if the present pain turn the mind of the sufferer to the Lord, it is the end of all preceding sins: but if he is not turned to the fear of the Lord, it is the beginning of future pains. We must then be careful and exercise the utmost vigilance, with tears to ensure the conversion of the whole mind, lest we pass from torments to torments. We should reflect also with how much provident gentleness our Creator acts towards us, whom, although worthy of death, he strikes assiduously, but as yet does not kill. He threatens what he is going to do, but yet he does it not, so that the pains running through us may terrify and turn us to the fear of the strict Judge, and thus shield us from his reproof at the termination of life. For who can tell, who can number how many abandoned to their luxury, breaking forth into blasphemy and pride, remaining in rapine and iniquity until the day of their death, so live in the world that they suffer no pain, not even a headache, but yet, being struck down suddenly, are cast into the fire of hell? But we, who are strenuously scourged, have a sign that we are not deserted, according to the testimony of Scripture which says: *For whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*[1] In these stripes of God we call to mind both his gifts and our losses by our guilt. Let us think how much good the Lord has done to us above our malice,

[1] Heb. xii 6.

and how much evil we have committed under his goodness."[1]

His maladies returned in 603, and he thus writes to Rusticiana: "But I live in such groaning and occupations that I grieve to have reached the days in which I live, and the expectation of death is the only consolation to me. Thus I ask you to pray for me that I may more quickly be taken out of this prison of flesh, that I may no longer be tormented with so great pains."[2] In one of his last letters he excuses himself from attending to some business of Queen Theodolinda, to whom he writes: "So great weakness of the gout has taken possession of us, that we are not only scarcely able to rise to dictate, but even to speak, as your legates, the bearers of this, will testify; for when they came they found us sick, and on their departure they leave us in the greatest danger and crisis of life. But if, by the dispensation of God, I shall recover, I shall minutely reply to all that you have written to me."[3]

In connection with the constant work, anxiety, and correspondence of the great Pontiff, this martyrdom of suffering gives a glimpse of the heroic fortitude and patience of Gregory. Prostrate on his bed, writhing with intense pain and groaning to obtain some alleviation, the effort to concentrate his thoughts on the business before him and to dictate his letters intermittently must have been extreme. On the days that he tore himself from his bed to go through a long ceremonial, which the acute pain of his malady rendered almost insupportable, he presented an example of passive endurance that increases our

[1] Ep. xi 30. [2] Ep. xiii 22. [3] Ep. xiv 12.

admiration for the sterling merit of the saint. The letters of his latter years show no failure of mental power; they are as frequent and important, and are written with the same care and insight as at the beginning. His end and reward came on March 12, 604, in the sixty-fifth year of his age and the fourteenth of his Pontificate. He was buried at St Peter's, where his body, translated by Gregory IV, now rests under the altar of St Andrew.

His death was followed by a display of the fickleness of the Roman mob. There was scarcely a family that he had not benefited by his bounty, and during his life all were enthusiastic in his praise; but when after his death famine and distress pervaded the city, evil-minded men stirred up the people, who, excited by their malicious suggestions, accused Gregory of wasting and dissipating the treasures of the Church and leaving the people without resource. In their insane excitement they determined to destroy all memorial of his name, and prepared to burn his writings. This senseless proceeding was arrested by a tragic incident, related by John the Deacon and filled in by legend. Peter the Deacon had been Gregory's familiar friend and secretary, and, while the saint dictated, he transcribed the words in the same room behind a curtain. One day, in the midst of the dictation, a long silence ensued, and curiosity prompted the secretary to make a hole in the curtain, through which he saw the saint with his hands raised in prayer, and a dove near his head, and whenever the saint hesitated the dove appeared. Gregory discovered that Peter knew his secret, and he strictly enjoined him never to divulge what he had seen,

threatening him that, if ever he revealed it, he should die suddenly. Learning the tumult and the purpose of the rioters, Peter, the faithful friend and companion, resolved to save his master's reputation and writings at the sacrifice of his own life. He came before the people, and, after obtaining a hearing, proposed to relate to them what he had seen in witness of the holy life of his master. He offered to swear on the holy Gospels to the truth of his narration, and if after the oath he should die suddenly, they were not to burn a single book, but if he survived, then he would be the first to set fire to them. He ascended the pulpit, narrated his story, took the oath, and immediately expired.

John the Deacon states that in his time (872) there still existed in the monastery of St Andrew on the Coelian portraits of Gregory and his father and mother, which were painted during the lifetime of the saint. He gives a description of the pictures written probably on the spot, and his minute details suggest a fair idea of the personal appearance of Gregory: "In a small apse, painted within a ring of plaster, Gregory is seen. Of average height and well-shaped, his face had the length of his father's with the fulness of his mother's, so combined as to seem becomingly lengthened with a slight roundness. The beard, like his father's, is somewhat tawny and scanty; the head bald, with two sparse curls on the forehead bent back to the right; the crown of the head is round and large, with dark hair neatly curled and reaching down below the middle of the ear; the forehead is handsome, with eyebrows long, slender and elevated; the eyes are not large but open, with

a greenish tint in the pupil, and the under eyelids full; the nose near its base at the juncture of the eyebrows is thin, grows broader near the middle, then curves a little, and at its termination is prominent at the open nostrils; the lips are ruddy, full, and sub-divided, the cheeks shapely, and the chin projecting slightly from the confines of the jaws. The complexion is swarthy and sallow, but not with the pallor of later life; the expression is gentle, the hands are graceful, with slender fingers adapted for writing. He wears a *planeta* of a chestnut hue covering the dalmatic; in the left hand is a book of the Gospels, the right being raised to make the sign of the cross; an ordinary pallium comes down from the right shoulder, turns with a circular fold above the waist, and then passes over the left shoulder to the back; the other end, coming over the same shoulder, hangs down, not in front of the body, but at the side. Behind the head is a square tablet, the symbol of a person still living, and not a nimbus. From which it is most plainly declared that Gregory, while he lived, wisely wished his likeness to be painted, that he might be frequently seen by his monks, not for the vaunting of his dignity, but as a reminder of his known severity. He himself dictated the following distich for it:

> "*Christe potens, Domine, nostri largitor honoris,*
> *Indultum officium solita pietate guberna.*"[1]

[1] *John the Deacon*, iv 84.

THE END

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Z 64s St. Gregory the Great, his
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